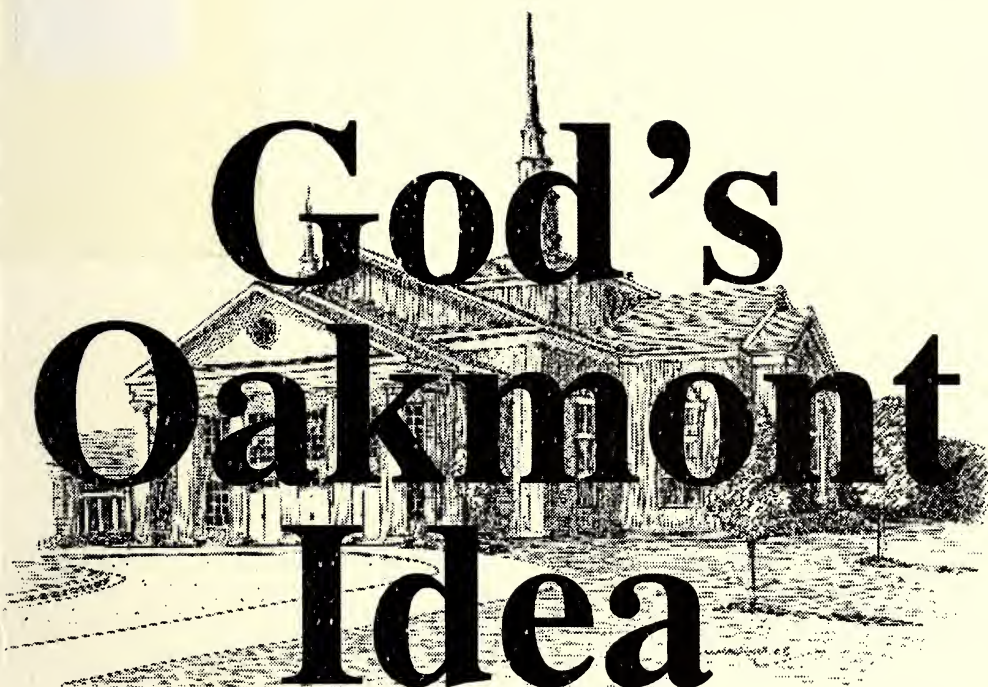


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God's Oakmont Idea

A History of Oakmont Baptist Church
1964-2004

By Donald R. Lennon

**Cover sketch by Roger E. Kammerer, Jr.,
design by Rev. Steve Harding**



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GOD'S OAKMONT IDEA

**A History of
Oakmont Baptist Church,
1964-2004**

by

Donald R. Lennon

**Greenville, North Carolina
2005**

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DEDICATION

This history is dedicated to Mrs. Robert L. (Claire) Holt, one of the most thoroughly Christian ladies I have ever known. She, along with the other forty-one charter members of Oakmont Baptist Church, had the vision, determination, and faith to follow God's directions to a new mission field in Greenville, North Carolina. Their story is remarkable and inspiring.

PREFACE

It has been 31 years since charter member Claire Holt wrote the first 10 year history of Oakmont Baptist Church. Five years later, in 1979, Claire Holt and Don Lennon updated that history for the church's 15th anniversary. Nurtured around discussions in the living room of Kenneth and Eleanor Mercer, also charter members, and then birthed on April 26, 1964 on the campus of East Carolina College, the church indeed has enjoyed a remarkable history that now has been re-told for the next generation of Oakmont members. Another Oakmont historian has accomplished that task with great care and insight as we begin our 42nd year as a community of faith.

Donald R. Lennon is well equipped to write a history of Oakmont's first 40 years. A native of Leland, North Carolina, Don was associated with East Carolina University in a variety of roles from 1967 until 2001. Over his 34 year distinguished career, Don served on the faculty as an associate professor of history. He likewise served the University as the Coordinator of Special Collections and Director of the East Carolina Manuscript Collection. During those years as a historian, he authored and/or edited numerous books, articles, book reviews, and other publications.

I suppose that not even Don has an adequate accounting of the untold hours he spent researching and writing this history. It was not unusual to find Don seated at the small table in the Rawl Parlor kitchen, rummaging through church newsletters, deacon or church business meeting minutes, or other historical documents piled before him. As the footnotes indicate, a great deal of this research is a result of Don's oral interviews that he conducted with charter members and other key leaders who lived the first 40 years of history.

Don Lennon, however, has not just given us a record of our historical journey together. He has offered both a chronological and interpretive guide that provides an accurate, forthright, and engaging record of the growing and changing seasons of the church's life. Our words of gratitude to Don will never equal the hours that he gave to make this Oakmont history a reality. The one saving grace of Don's efforts and energies is that perhaps the writing of this history enabled Don, and his wife Billie, to spend some additional time enjoying the wondrous scenery at their beloved North Carolina mountain home.

May we read the record of Oakmont's history with gratitude and thanksgiving to God for our own part in sharing the journey. And may we find the same courage and grace to be God's people in the 21st century with the same degree of sacrifice and faith as did those early members who have made possible God's Oakmont Idea!

Gregory P. Rogers, Pastor
August 2005

FOREWARD

This study is primarily based on the actual records of Oakmont Baptist Church. Minutes of the church, deacons' minutes, and the church newsletter were absolutely essential to the history. Also of great importance were occasional bulletins, booklets, pamphlets and reports housed at the church or preserved by early members. Unfortunately, there are substantial gaps in the records, making it almost impossible to provide a completely accurate account of the church's forty years of development. There do not appear to be any extant minutes at the church for the periods between August 2, 1964 and October 24, 1965, October 24, 1965 and February 9, 1966, November 27, 1966 and March 3, 1968, October 1972 and July 1974, and July 1978 to January 1982. Some of the missing minutes for the 1970s do exist on microfilm in the East Carolina Manuscript Collection at East Carolina University. Obviously, those minutes disappeared from the church after they were microfilmed in 1983. Additionally, deacons' minutes do not exist prior to August 11, 1965 and there are no church newsletters (*Tower Topics* or *Oakmont Messenger*) between 1968 and 1972. To compound the problem even further, the records do not always agree in content.

Essential to the early years of the church's founding were letters written by Mrs. Robert L. (Claire) Holt to her mother Mrs. Mabel Clyde Hardin. These remarkably detailed accounts were penned within days of the events described. Equally significant were oral interviews conducted with E. R. "Pete" and Grace Carraway, Jeanne Conklin, Robert L. Holt, Greenville and Martha Banks, James Bearden, Gregory Rogers, and Charles Stevens. In addition to their reminiscences, the advice and counsel these individuals provided was invaluable. In particular, Gregory Rogers and Greenville

Banks patiently proofread and critiqued the manuscript as it developed. Sincere gratitude is expressed to each of the helpful Oakmont members who assisted in the project as well as to my wife, Billie, for her patience, editing skills, and proof-reading abilities. Also of substantial assistance to the project were Steve Harding, Beth Thompson, and Faye Steele, who helped with the photographs, and Anne Reese, Sally Pride, and Lauri Johnson of the church staff who came to my rescue on more than one occasion.

INTRODUCTION

On October 19, 2003 some 951 members and guests gathered in the sanctuary of Oakmont Baptist Church to dedicate its new worship center. The facility included a magnificent sanctuary with a capacity of 997 persons, spacious choir and drama practice rooms, a recording and sound studio, a music library, classrooms, a prayer garden, an imposing narthex, and other worship space. The choir loft in the sanctuary was designed to seat approximately sixty-five choir members while the orchestra area accommodates twenty-five musicians. This 28,000 square foot addition, when combined with earlier construction, provided Oakmont with approximately 60,000 square feet of worship and study space.

At this time Oakmont provides twenty-four adult and twenty-five children's and youth Sunday School classes. The church also offers a wide variety of Bible study and missions activities. There are innumerable ministry opportunities including ten choirs, three vocal ensembles, a contemporary Christian band, a church orchestra, an instrumental ensemble, an adult hand-bell ensemble, a children's hand-bell ensemble, drama teams for adults and youth, athletic teams, youth activities, three WMU groups, and a Baptist Men's group.

Considering the wide array of worship programs and the size and scope of the physical facilities, one can only wonder how it all developed in only forty years. The church

began with forty-two devoted members-no building, no property, no name, no pastor-but a world of faith. Charter members insist that the Oakmont Baptist Church of 2004 is the result of “God’s Oakmont idea.”¹

¹This phrase originated with Dr. James Bearden when it was used in a church video that he prepared in 1992.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

The Oakmont Church family originated from The Memorial Baptist Church, which in 1964 was located at the corner of Third and Greene Streets in downtown Greenville, North Carolina. In 1915, a group of Memorial members had split from the church and formed Immanuel Baptist Church, Greenville's second Baptist congregation. In 1956, Memorial and Immanuel churches joined forces to establish a mission church to serve the southwest section of the growing town. This mission church became Arlington Street [Boulevard] Baptist Church in 1957 after it broke ground for a building on Arlington.¹ Despite the presence of these three Baptist churches in Greenville, Memorial Church continued to have severe space problems. This overcrowding was in part the result of Greenville's phenomenal growth because of rapidly increasing enrollment at East Carolina College and the introduction of numerous new industries into the area. DuPont, Fieldcrest Mills, and the Voice of America were among the numerous new establishments opening in the area. The Chamber of Commerce had estimated that the Greenville population would increase by 600 families per year for the next few years. Baptists made up the largest group of new residents moving to the area. The Memorial Baptist Church sanctuary was inadequate to seat the crowds that gathered for services on most Sunday mornings during the autumn months and Immanuel could not accommodate the overflow.²

As early as 1955, the problem of overcrowding had been the topic of repeated church meetings and E.E. Rawl had been appointed chairman of a building fund campaign to

raise the necessary capital for a new Memorial facility. Little progress was made despite repeated admonitions from various committees and groups within the church. This effort was stymied by a lack of agreement on whether an addition to the downtown structure would be more acceptable than a new construction project on the city outskirts. In 1957, the church initiated two Sunday worship services to try to accommodate the crowds but in 1960, the early service was discontinued. An effort was made to provide a closed-circuit television hookup so that overflow crowds could watch the service from classrooms. This practice was unsuccessful because late arrivals preferred to go to other churches rather than depend on a television monitor.³

By the early spring of 1964, some members were desperate to find a solution to the space problem at Memorial. Potential attendees were being turned away from the worship service each Sunday. Without immediate action to alleviate the situation, hundreds of new Baptist residents arriving in Greenville would be forced to go elsewhere. Repeated building recommendations by the Memorial diaconate either “died on the pastor’s desk” or the deacons refused to push for action. It seemed that there was little outreach at Memorial and an element within the church opposed any change that would upset the status quo.⁴

In late March 1964 a small group of active Memorial members, most of whom lived in new residential areas on the southern fringe of the city bordering on Greenville Boulevard, met informally at the home of Kenneth and Eleanor Mercer to discuss the problem. In addition to addressing the space concerns, this group felt that it was their Christian duty to encourage Memorial to open its church doors to people of all races and creeds. Such a view was not popular with an element at Memorial who subscribed to the selectivity theory for church fellowship.⁵ After some discussion Dr. Robert L. “Bob” Holt suggested they should organize a new church to

serve the southern portion of the city (an area that had been growing rapidly over the past few years). The idea was immediately adopted by the entire group and a plan began to take form. A delegation, made up of E.R. "Pete" Carraway, Kenneth Mercer, Bob Holt, and F. Milam Johnson, was appointed to talk with Memorial pastor Rev. Percy Upchurch. Earlier informal chats with Rev. Upchurch had led the group to believe that he would be receptive to the idea, since it may relieve him of responsibility for leading a building program at Memorial. The delegation explained the group's proposal for a new church to the pastor and asked for his blessings and support before they approached the Memorial membership in a general meeting. Rev. Upchurch requested that the group delay reporting their intentions to the membership until after they held meetings with the diaconate, a group of area Baptist ministers, and representatives of the South Roanoke Baptist Association.⁶

When the committee met with the associational missionary, he reminded them that there were proper procedures to follow before a new church could be formed. First, a survey of Greenville residents was needed to determine if anyone would be interested in attending a new church. Second, the new congregation should become a mission under the auspices of The Memorial Baptist Church until internal leadership developed. The delegation informed him that people were being turned away from the present Baptist churches on a regular basis. In addition, the group pointed out that the proposed congregation already included two ordained ministers, a significant number of ordained deacons, several experienced Sunday School administrators, and a full complement of experienced Sunday School teachers. They then asked what other leadership would they possibly need. The missionary agreed and gave his blessings to the proposal.⁷

A called Associational "rally" with area Baptist pastors was held; and although negative rumors about the inten-

tions of the group raised questions among the pastors, all issues were quickly resolved. A unanimous vote of support was cast by the pastors. Before all of the requested meetings could be completed, reports of the new church effort were spread among the Memorial congregation, casting the group in a less than favorable light. There was “gossip” that the entire scheme was intended to undercut the Memorial pastor and split the church. The pastor confided to friends that he “was having a baby and he didn’t even know that he was pregnant.”⁸ One deacon reportedly commented to a leader of the new church group that they could leave the church, but they would never receive one dime of financial support from Memorial. The Sunday after meeting with the deacons, one of the group’s spokesmen found that he had already been replaced as Sunday School division leader at Memorial. One Sunday School teacher, who hoped to explain to her class members why she was planning to leave the church, was informed by a deacon, who was also the Sunday School superintendent, that if she attempted to discuss this issue during Sunday School he would organize a class boycott. On Sunday, the teacher was confronted by the class president who announced that she would not remain in the class to hear the explanation.⁹

The negative response from some of the Memorial leaders and membership came as a shock to members of the group since they had always actively supported the church and were among the more committed tithers in the Memorial family. They counted among their number five deacons, a past W.M.U. president, two Sunday School teachers, a Sunday School department superintendent, an assistant superintendent, Training Union leaders, and numerous others who held leadership roles in the church.¹⁰

Although there was this small undercurrent of resentment, the vast majority of Memorial members was supportive and bade the group well. Miss Ernelle Brooks, a missionary to Nigeria, promptly offered her home in Greenville as a

parsonage for the new church while she was away on the mission field. Mrs. Maggie Stroud, a longtime Memorial member, urged the congregation to let their “departing ‘brothers and sisters’ go in peace.” Dr. Robert Lee Humber, an international lawyer, state senator, and philanthropist, supported the effort.¹¹

In departing for the new church, charter member Mrs. Grace Carraway wrote to her former minister expressing her love for Memorial and its congregation.

We have not felt drawn to leave for any reason Memorial church [sic.], but rather we have felt led to go to the new work. We have prayed and do pray that our motives may be pure and acceptable by God. Along with going into a new place of work comes the leaving of ‘home’. . . Leaving is hard. Right now I can’t begin to see how the void created by leaving Memorial Church and no longer have you for my pastor can be filled. I’ve been praying for more faith that God will meet our needs. He always has.¹²

When the petition to release the group’s church letters was presented to the congregation on April 26, it contained the names of thirty-four Memorial members. The group was approved for release without opposition.¹³



Charter members of Oakmont Baptist Church (See Appendix 1 for names)

That same afternoon the prospective congregation and supporters met in Rawl Auditorium on the East Carolina College campus for an organizational meeting. Rev. Percy Upchurch presided until Rev. John Moore was elected as moderator. Dr. Robert Holt offered a motion to establish a new Missionary Baptist church and Pete Carraway moved adoption of the resolution. The motion passed unanimously. Rev. Irby Jackson, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, presented the church covenant for adoption and the Articles of Faith was presented by Rev. Robert N. Nash, pastor of Arlington Street Baptist Church. Rev. E. Gordon Conklin, pastor of First Baptist Church, Kinston, delivered the sermon "What My Church Does For Me." Rev. Tommy Payne, pastor of First Baptist Church, Robersonville, led in the prayer of dedication for the church.¹⁴

There were thirty-nine official charter members for the "New Baptist Church," (although three more were added before the charter member list was closed a month later on May 26). The new church had no name, no building, no pastor, but the congregation had a whole world of faith. The early planners contended that as long as they had eleven "bread-winners" (there were basically eleven families making up the charter membership) who would pledge to tithe, then they could pay a minister and take care of basic expenses. Until a pastor could be employed, Robert Holt and F. Milan Johnson agreed to serve as ministers on a rotating basis. Dr. Holt was the vice president and academic dean at East Carolina College, and Mr. Johnson served on the faculty. Both men were ordained ministers with superb credentials to handle this responsibility. After each service, the church treasurer would present a check for \$25 to the minister of the day. He would endorse the check and hand it back to the treasurer for deposit in the church account. The church members could then boast that from the very beginning they paid their ministers.¹⁵ For some months, a full schedule of Sunday School and wor-

ship services were held in the Rawl Building. Each Sunday the members would arrive with hymnals, cribs, toys, flowers, offering plates, and everything else needed to replicate the facilities of established churches. After services, the equipment was all returned to the homes where it was stored. From the very beginning, the congregation agreed that communion would be offered every first Sunday of the month. A.B. Whitley, a charter member, provided a church office adjoining his place of business. Due to the lack of copying equipment, a ream of paper was purchased so that monthly contribution reports could be reproduced at Carolina Sales Corporation, a local wholesaler managed by a church member. Miss Brooks' home served as the parsonage on a temporary basis. Remarkably, from the very beginning the church was fully functional.¹⁶

The attendance grew so rapidly that by October 25, 1964, the congregation was forced to move to the much larger "Old Austin" Building auditorium, where the church paid a monthly rent of \$40. Austin was one of the oldest buildings on the East Carolina campus. The spaciousness, location, and character of "Old Austin" attracted students and visitors. In this new location, the service accouterments could be stored in the building's third floor attic. Each Sunday, church youth would ride the freight elevator to the third floor and return with the service furnishings. The auditorium was equipped with an impressive pipe organ, which on Sunday mornings attracted many students who passed the open windows of the building and heard the music. Bruce Sloop, a married man with a family, was the first part-time choir director hired by the "New Baptist Church." Unfortunately, Mr. Sloop was not otherwise employed and his church pay was inadequate to sustain a family. He resigned in June 1966 and Dr. Charles Stevens from the faculty of the Music Department at East Carolina College accepted the position of choir director. A college student, Richard Orr, served as the first organist and

Mrs. Keith Cain, a member of the church, became pianist.¹⁷



Rev. Tommy Payne, Pastor 1964 -1971

During October 1964, the Women's Missionary Union was organized and quickly became a vital part of the church's mission. Wednesday night prayer meetings convened at members' homes; and for the first year, weekly business meetings followed the prayer services. Six members, who had been

ordained previously as deacons, were selected as the original diaconate. Ed Cain, Mrs. Josephine Rawl, and Kenneth Mercer were elected as trustees for the church.¹⁸ A full slate of church and Sunday School officers were quickly elected. Committees began to work on building, constitution, and pastoral issues. On May 13, 1964, Ed Rawl, Jr. reported that the Building and Site Committee had located suitable property for a building on the Tucker farm located on the undeveloped, unpaved Red Banks Road south of the city. Just over seven acres (7.08 ac.) of a cornfield was purchased from Mrs. Mattie Tucker for \$29,500 and the committee was empowered to employ the firm of Haskins and Rice as architects for the project. Also in May, the congregation voted to call Rev. Tommy Payne to become the first pastor for the church to commence his duties in August.¹⁹

Tommy J. Payne was born at Cherokee, N. C. to missionary parents who were working on the Cherokee Indian reservation. He had graduated from Carson Newman College and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He had most recently served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Robersonville. Rev. Payne was a trustee of Campbell College, a member of the Committee on Nominations for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and chairman of the missions committee for the South Roanoke Baptist Association.²⁰

Although it had been an unwritten understanding from the very beginning, the church adopted an official policy that it would not proselytize members of other churches in the city. This very issue had been of major concern for both Memorial and Immanuel churches and rumors had abounded that the new church would undertake to "steal" their members. With this new policy, the issue should have ceased to be a point of contention. Yet, Pete Carraway received an angry telephone call complaining that church members, conducting a door-to-door canvas in the neighborhood where the new

church would be constructed, had knocked on the door of a Memorial member. Mr. Carraway politely explained that there was no way they could know church affiliation before knocking on doors.²¹

On June 17, 1964, the congregation voted unanimously to name the new church The Oakmont Baptist Church since it would border on the new subdivision by that name. Interestingly enough, Oakmont Subdivision contained few houses and filled only a portion of the space between Greenville Boulevard and Red Banks Road. Sherwood Drive ended at Knollwood Drive and the remaining acreage was still under cultivation. Bob Holt, who lived on Knollwood Drive, recalled sitting on his front porch and watching a farmer plow his field. Town people could not understand why the Oakmont congregation would go "way out in the country to build a church. No one would go out there to join them." Yet, work was underway on the building plans and the congregation looked to a future with great potential growth for the new church.²²

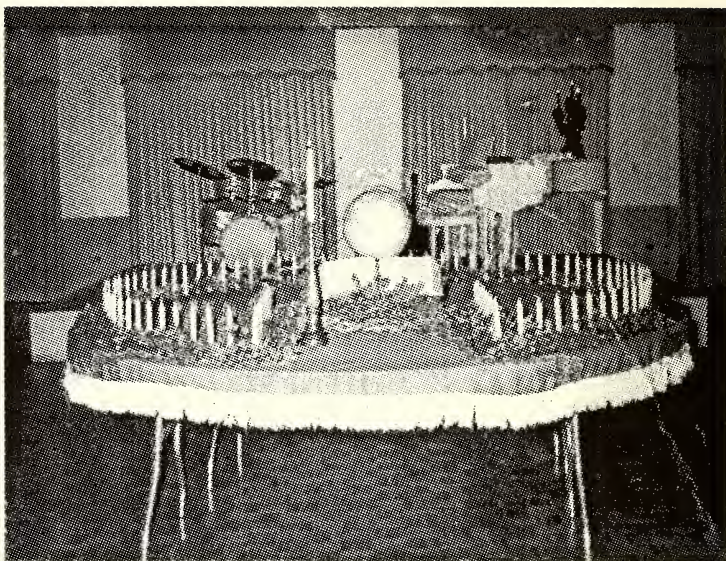
From the beginning, church leaders envisioned a five-stage construction program. Initially, they would construct a fellowship hall that could be used temporarily as a sanctuary to seat 350 persons, Sunday School classrooms that would accommodate 300 individuals, a kitchen, parlor, and church offices. When the need for additional facilities arose in the future, a second phase would focus on additional classrooms. A third stage would provide a permanent sanctuary capable of holding more than 1000 churchgoers. The fourth phase would concentrate on the need for more classrooms, and a fifth phase would provide for a youth building.²³

During the months before Rev. Tommy Payne arrived in August 1964, the ministerial duties were left primarily to Bob Holt and Milan Johnson. Miss Ernelle Brooks, missionary to Nigeria, delivered at least one worship sermon during July before departing for the mission field. Rev. Payne trav-

eled through the Holy Land during the spring and early summer before taking on the Oakmont ministry. Rev. Payne, writing in the first issue of the church newsletter "Oakmont Messenger," set the tone by which the church would thrive. He wrote, "We will respect the past, but we shall not be bound by it. We will honor and serve our denomination, but we will not be its slave. . . . We believe that a New Testament Church is a church controlled by the decisions of the congregation."²⁴ Members remember Tommy Payne as a man of great enthusiasm and a natural promoter. Under his guidance the congregation grew rapidly.

The Oakmont congregation was unique in several ways. According to Dr. Robert Holt, the early membership included "conservatives, middle-of-the-roaders, and liberals." There hope was to have a church open to all people regardless of race or denominational background. They shared ideas and worked together. Members felt comfortable in expressing themselves on issues facing the church and the denomination and no one took offense at the view of others. They compromised, accepted the vote of the majority, and moved on to the next issue. Also, important to the development of the church was the understanding that members would tithe. For some years a preponderance of members abided by this understanding and it had a profound effect on the commitment of the congregation.²⁵

The church had its first "pledge" Sunday on December 6, 1964 with a Fellowship Supper at the Greenville Country Club. One hundred people attended the supper and pledged \$460 per week for the coming year. Seventy-six of the attendees pledged to tithe. In writing to her mother on December 11, Claire Holt described the event in some detail:



Centerpiece for first Pledge Night Supper, December 6, 1964

The purpose of the dinner was fellowship, with specific emphasis on new members making new pledges & old ones re-subscribing to the 1965 budget and rededicating our possessions and ourselves. The big room was decorated beautifully by a committee from our church. In the central and most obvious place was a round table. On the table were a globe & and a big open pulpit Bible. All around the edge, entwined with Christmas greenery were white candles. After light entertainment by two youngsters (drums and a guitar! Sounds queer, but it hit the spot for the young folks) and a quintet with several songs more in keeping with middle age taste. . . . , the group joined the quintet singing 'Silent Night.' Then Otis Hagler presented an excellent stewardship speech-light and entertaining right up to his more serious climax. After this, Tommy & his family led the way to the central table, each lighting a candle and dropping his pledge card in the collection plate in front of the Bible. Church members and Sunday School children followed in families. It was a most impressive service as we saw the symbol of the world lit up by the Word and by the light of Christian dedication.²⁶

There obviously was an enormous amount of enthusiasm for the new church and its ministry, as can be seen from the rapid growth in membership and programs. The pledge night had resulted in a 1965 budget of \$23,000 and a premature plan got underway to hire an educational director for the church. By December 18, 1964, the church counted eighty-nine members. Sylvia Carraway became the first individual to be baptized into the membership. During this same period, the first baby was born into the church family when Pauline L. Bearden was born on November 21 to James and Polly Bearden. Over the next few months the men's breakfast was begun, the Women's Missionary Union grew rapidly, a highly successful church basketball team was formed as part of the City Church League, a student fellowship got underway, and the church voted to donate \$100 to the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.²⁷

At the June 8, 1966, business meeting, the congregation drew up goals for the summer that called for a 30% increase in attendance and membership. Members were assigned to provide outings for newcomers and the church agreed to sponsor a social each month during the remainder of the summer.²⁸

During 1966, the Oakmont leadership worked with other groups and individuals to press for the paving of Red Banks Road. The church was assessed \$2.50 per running foot for paving, gutter, and storm sewer work on the road. As the project progressed, Oakmont was offered the dirt removed by the contractor for the road. Since the land upon which the church was being constructed was low, the deacons gladly accepted the offer. The soil was spread throughout the lot around the new building. It was only when the church began construction on its first addition years later, that they learned the soil was not suitable for construction. It all had to be dug up and removed at a cost of \$20,000 to the church.²⁹

While a multitude of church activities were under-

way, the primary focus for the members was the imposing task of raising funds for and construction of the church building. The General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention gave the church \$2,100 to help pay for its building lot and a year later it provided another \$500. A total of \$3,600 had been promised, but apparently the final \$1,000 was never forthcoming. The Building and Site Committee's plan was to issue \$200,000 in first mortgage church bonds, which would be retired over fourteen and a half years at 6% interest. Ed E. Rawl, Jr., A.B. Whitley, and J.W. Pou provided leadership for the Building and Finance committees, which took responsibility for the bond drive. One future issuance of bonds was actually printed by the church. Church members held the major responsibility for selling (and buying) bonds and the effort was successful enough that a



A.B. Whitley turning shovel of dirt
during groundbreaking service,
April 24, 1966



Sign marking the
location for the
church building

groundbreaking service was held on April 24, 1966. Construction got underway in late August of that year, but inflation made it obvious that funding was inadequate for the expenses that were encumbered. Deacons recommended that a second

bond sale be conducted during January through March 1967. This bond sale was in the amount of \$50,000 with Dr. James Bearden as chairman of the campaign. Additionally, in May 1967, the deacons were forced to borrow \$15,000 from Wachovia Bank on the signature of each deacon.³⁰

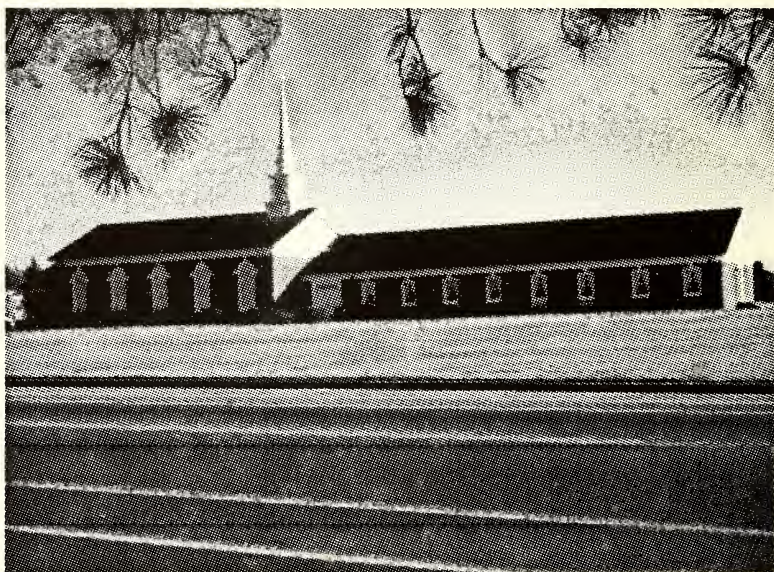
During 1967, Miss Ernelle Brooks returned from the mission field and her home was vacated by the pastor. The church painted Miss Brooks' house, paid taxes for 1967, and provided for the homeowners insurance through 1968.³¹

In anticipation of the distance from the East Carolina campus that the new church structure would be located, student attendees began a project to raise funds for a church bus to transport students. As a result of this effort, an old 1954 Chevrolet bus was purchased and presented to the church in 1967.³²



Oakmont Baptist Church under construction

By the fall of 1967, the new building was in service. On October 15, 1967, during the first morning worship service in the new sanctuary, “a candlelight observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper were held in the beautiful and commodious new quarters.”³³ The formal dedication of the new church was held on April 28, 1968. The Campbell College choir sang for the occasion and Dr. Perry Crouch, Executive Secretary of the Baptist State Convention, delivered the sermon. Also on the program was Marse Grant, editor of the *Biblical Recorder*, who spoke on “The Church and the Denomination.” Pastor Tommy Payne provided a fitting pledge when he proclaimed : “Let this building stand as an instrument where the mind can search for truth—where a struggling soul can find comfort and forgiveness—and where brotherhood of mankind is a way of life.”³⁴



Church building as it appeared after dedication in 1967, except for steeple that was added in 1983



A Pledge Night Supper as held in the
sanctuary prior to installation of pews in 1978



Longtime church trustees Vernon Tyson,
Josephine L. Rawl, and W. Ed Cain

The congregation found themselves occupying a very handsome Colonial Williamsburg style sanctuary. In lieu of pews, folding chairs had been purchased to accommodate 300 persons. Use of folding chairs maximized the space available and provided a measure of flexibility in utilizing the room for other events. The new sanctuary was enhanced by the gift of a church organ, donated by Mr. & Mrs. Robert D.C. Meeker, Jr. in honor of Mr. & Mrs. John F. Steinman and in memory of Mrs. Caroline W. Winberry. Since funds were so limited the church invited members to individually contribute funds to purchase the furnishings. A catalog was prepared complete with blueprint drawings, which provided numbers and prices for everything from chairs to carpeting. Even the pulpit and podium chairs were included in the furnishings catalog and a memorial book was proposed to record each gift. The effort was successful; and, when the new building was occupied during the fall of 1967, much of the furnishing was complete.³⁵

A church constitution committee, chaired by Mrs. Claire Holt, had labored diligently from the early days of the church. By March 1968, the new church constitution, statement of purpose, church covenant, and articles of faith had undergone close scrutiny by the deacons and the congregation and was adopted by the membership. The document was based largely on Baptist State Convention recommendations along with constitutions from such varying progressive church establishments as Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, and St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte. In the "Statement of Purpose," the constitution committee specified that every aspect of the church organization, development, and procedures "should be relegated to its primary purpose of Christian experience and witness. Thus, while gratefully drawing upon our remarkable Baptist heritage and seeking to work within that tradition, we desire that denominationalism be a vehicle to implement our primary purpose and not an end in itself. It is our

conviction that this primary purpose of Christian commitment should transcend not only denominationalism, but also the boundaries of race and status.”³⁶

The constitution provided a modern and progressive framework for the church’s future. For the first time, all members who had been a part of the church family for at least a year were eligible for election to the diaconate. Previously, only men could be considered for election to deacon. Candidates for membership who came from other denominations of evangelical tradition, who had experienced believer’s baptism regardless of mode, could be accepted by letter or statement without re-baptism. The document provided for a minister of the church and such other assistant ministers as may be deemed necessary as the congregation grew. Specific references were made to a minister of education as a possible position covered by the constitution and other non-ministerial positions as a secretary, organist, and sexton. The constitution stipulated that Oakmont “shall actively encourage the outgrowth of missions and/or churches from this church as the city of Greenville expands.” It also spoke to initiating and nourishing cooperative relationships with “other religious, civic, or charitable organizations.”³⁷

With the encouragement of Rev. Payne, the congregation attempted to pursue an inclusive policy. He urged a personal approach to Christianity and advocated organizing combined prayer services with other churches in the city, both black and white. By February 1971, the church had hosted at least one interdenominational and interracial Sunday night service with the theme of “Love your Neighbor.” This effort was intended to strengthen Christian brotherhood in Greenville. Among other activities of the church during this period, a Boy Scout troop was organized, a youth group made a mission trip to Nassau during the Easter holidays, the church facilities were made available as a meeting place for an Al Anon Group, and the Men’s Fellowship organized monthly

breakfast meetings as a part of their effort to bring the men of the church together for fellowship.³⁸

This was an era when a personal approach to ministry was welcomed and appreciated. For many years Kenneth Mercer served in the role of “official greeter” for services. With his pocket filled with peppermint candy, his handshake was accompanied by the offer of a peppermint treat. Other members recount that it was not unusual for Mr. Mercer to cruise the East Carolina College campus in his Cadillac on Sunday mornings inviting students to church. One such student responded that he was not properly dressed. Mr. Mercer assured him that he would wait while the student returned to his dorm room to change.³⁹

The new Oakmont facility was constructed without the benefit of air-conditioning and members realized that this failure had resulted in considerable discomfort during the hot, humid Greenville summers. Kenneth Mercer led a successful drive to raise \$18,000 for a central air-conditioning unit and Melvin Hathaway gave of his time and expertise to install the equipment. By April 1971, the church was prepared for the summer season with a properly air-conditioned building.⁴⁰

Despite the many positive accomplishments of Oakmont during this time, the financial drain on the church was enormous. Early members recall that on several occasions the church treasurer had to visit Kenneth Mercer and other members to request that they give their next week’s tithe in advance so that current debts could be paid. The diaconate struggled with reports that the church was behind in its bond retirement plan and revenues were far behind expenditures. The budget for 1969 had been set at \$53,211, but pledges for the year had only reached \$43,800. At the end of that year the church had failed to meet its operating needs by \$11,000 and the deacons were forced to borrow \$3,000 to meet payments on bonds and interest then due. On May 10, 1970, the treasurer reported that the Bond Sinking Fund con-

tained only \$.57. Eight thousand dollars was needed by July 1 to redeem bonds that had come due. At a business meeting on July 14, 1971, it was reported that church tithes had not increased between 1965 and 1970 despite growth of the church congregation to 341 total members. The members agreed to issue \$50,000 in new bonds carrying a 7% interest to mature in 1978. By November, the Finance Committee, in an effort to relieve the "present financial situation," decided to ask all members to bring their pledges up to date and to ask bond holders to donate their bonds back to the church for resale. Within a year \$50,000 of an earlier bond issue matured. Since the church lacked the funds to pay off the bonds, it was decided to resell \$25,000 of them. Further compounding the financial problems, there had been a chronic shortage in attendance at both business and deacons' meetings. The church was forced to change the quorum requirement for business meetings from 10% to 5% and for deacons' meetings from two-thirds to one-half of the membership being present in order to conduct the church's business.⁴¹

Rev. Payne had been the perfect choice as Oakmont's first pastor due to his enthusiasm and his talent as a motivator. Some members began to feel, however, that he was so involved in a wide range of non-church activities that he was losing interest in the weekly routine of managing the church and preparing sermons for the congregation. On March 14, 1971, Tommy Payne resigned as pastor to be effective May 15. In his letter to the church, he commented that he was resigning at this time "simply because I feel it is the right thing to do." After leaving Oakmont, Rev. Payne would serve as pastor of Pactolus Baptist Church.⁴²

CHAPTER II

THE CONKLIN YEARS



Rev. E. Gordon Conklin, pastor 1971-1986

Without a pastor for the first time since the infancy of the church, a search committee was formed to locate new leadership for Oakmont. The committee quickly identified a popular choice in the Reverend E. Gordon Conklin, pastor of First Baptist Church of Kinston. Reverend Conklin had delivered the inaugural sermon to the infant church at its organizational meeting on April 26, 1964. After determining that Reverend Conklin was the choice of the committee, he was invited to a meeting where he was offered the call. After some discussion Gordon asked them to "let me go home and pray about it." Mrs. Leona "Granny" Mercer quickly quipped, "You go home and start packing, we will pray." On October 10,

1971, the Reverend E. Gordon Conklin was called as the second pastor for Oakmont Baptist Church, effective in December.¹

The Reverend E. Gordon Conklin was a veteran minister with broad experience. A native of Rockville, Maryland, he entered the University of Richmond at the age of 19 to seek a degree in Religious Studies. From the beginning he preached at small Methodist and Baptist churches in Virginia while studying at the university. His theology was molded in part by a professor at the University of Richmond who insisted that the students think for themselves. This perspective would be of great importance to Gordon in later years as the Southern Baptist Convention began to move to a more conservative theology. His studies were interrupted for two years near the end of World War II when he entered the Army as a chaplain's assistant at Fort Lee, Virginia. As a student he had met Jeanne Clayton; and, upon his return to school from the Army, they were married. After completing his degree, Gordon and Jeanne moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Gordon subsequently accepted the pastorate of Memorial Baptist Church in Williamston, North Carolina, and later moved to First Baptist Church in Kinston. He accepted the call to Oakmont because, as he told his wife, he felt that Oakmont was a very unusual church with a great future because "these people are really committed."²

Although Gordon was aware that Oakmont had financial problems, he was not prepared for the reality that faced him at his very first deacons' meeting. Dr. James Bearden had prepared a flip chart containing details of the financial crisis facing the church. It spelled out the necessity for the church membership to tithe as originally planned in order to help resolve the financial difficulties. After outlining the situation, Jim closed the chart and informed the deacons that "if

we don't want to do what has to be done, then we will have no choice but to close down and put the church on the block." The new pastor was shocked, and when he returned home that night he expressed his feelings to his wife. "Jeanne, you aren't going to believe what happened at the deacon's meeting tonight. Jim Bearden had a flip chart with figures on it and he started and went on and on until finally he flipped it over and said 'I just don't see anything for us to do but to put the church on the block.' I just told them 'that God didn't call me here to put this church on the block.'"

With the financial crisis as a constant reminder of the necessity of building a stronger, more dedicated congregation, Gordon focused on what Oakmont could do for God and what kind of witness it could be. In February 1973, the congregation was presented a proposal entitled Special Program Key '73. It consisted of a recommendation for a 10% increase in giving to the Cooperative Program, a 10% increase in Sunday School attendance, and a 10% increase in mission giving. Rev. Conklin recommended that all three 10% goals be adopted. Since the new budget already included a 10% increase in Cooperative Program and mission giving, the emphasis on a Sunday School initiative would be the key to success.⁴ It was obvious that the educational program was in need of serious attention and the youth program was considered very weak. One of the major goals was to meet the spiritual needs of young people while reaching out to the unchurched throughout the city. More adequate staffing was essential to the future of the church and to meeting the spiritual needs of the Oakmont youth. The first step was to acquire a summer youth worker from the student body of one of the seminaries. At the time, the total staff consisted of the pastor, a part-time secretary, a part-time choir director, and a part-time custodian.⁵

For the summer of 1975, the first such worker was Jeff Chadwick, who was followed by a young man from Ra-

leigh named Greg Rogers for 1976 and 1977. By late 1977, this position was transformed into a weekend Minister of Education slot with the idea of employing a second-year seminary student for the post. Mike Bradshaw was hired as Minister of Education & Youth for three weekends per month and for full-time service during the summer. Lanny Peters served the church during the summer of 1979 and Steve Mills occupied the position during 1980.⁶

The congregation welcomed the change to a more formal church ministry. Claire Holt, writing shortly after Reverend Conklin began his tenure, commented that "Gordon is doing a splendid job. It is wonderful to hear real messages on Sunday morning and to feel that the business of the church is in capable and dedicated hands."⁷ Innumerable changes and innovations were in store for the church family. For the first time, the pastor wore a ministerial robe during church services. On April 1, 1973, Gordon initiated the very popular "Communion in the Round." This service was made possible at Oakmont because the folding chairs in the church sanctuary could be placed in circles throughout the room and each group was individually offered the bread and cup. To make the service even more meaningful, Gordon ordered round loaves of unleavened bread for the occasion. He visited Diener's Bakery on Dickinson Avenue in Greenville and instructed Mr. Diener on the exact measurements for the loaves. After several orders of this nature, Mr. Diener inquired as to whether Gordon was a baker since he was always so precise in outlining exactly what he wanted.⁸

September 9, 1973 was declared University Sunday and all incoming students at East Carolina University were invited to join the congregation for dinner on the grounds. Members brought more than enough food for themselves and the students. It was an opportunity to visit with the students and welcome them back to Greenville. It was the beginning of a tradition that continued for many years. Other opportu-

nities for the congregation to enjoy fellowship during the Conklin years included summer ice cream socials at the church or at the Conklin residence and socials on the Pamlico River at the Rawl and Carraway cottages.⁹

Another tradition initiated by Gordon in his early years at Oakmont was the presence of a beautifully decorated Chrismon tree during the Advent season. He had observed this practice while pastoring a small church in Wakefield, Virginia, during his student days at the University of Richmond. The ladies of that Virginia church created the ornaments and the leader of that group was invited to Oakmont to show a group of volunteers how they were made. The Chrismon tree still adorns the Oakmont sanctuary each Advent season.¹⁰

Prior to Gordon arriving at Oakmont, there was no Maundy Thursday service leading up to Easter. For the first such service, they placed a long table on the podium and covered it with a white cloth. Deacons sat around the table facing the congregation with a large chair in the middle left vacant to represent Jesus. Although the nature of the service has changed over the years, Maundy Thursday services continue to be a popular part of the church program.¹¹

Several members have memories of the beginnings of Oakmont's Christmas Eve service. Gordon was concerned that people were so busy on Christmas Eve that they would not take time to participate but the service was scheduled anyway. It wasn't long before the service became very popular and capacity crowds became the norm. Eventually, two Christmas Eve services were necessary in order to accommodate all those who wished to attend.¹²

A substantial move forward was achieved during the spring of 1972 when the church established a library/media center for the congregation. Mrs. Lily R. Weaver, a professional librarian and a charter member of Oakmont, was responsible for setting up the facility and giving birth to a pro-

gram that has been popular with congregants ever since. Mrs. Weaver recalls that there was no money in the budget for books and materials and she had to depend on donations to get the library started. Until more permanent space could be located for the library, a small alcove was created in a corner of the narthex near the entrance to the children's wing. By 1990, the little library/media center that began with nothing was able to boast of having 1000 books in its holdings.¹³

One morning early in his tenure at Oakmont, Rev. Conklin arrived at the church to find all of his office furniture stacked in the hall. Peering inside, he found a crew of painters hard at work. He discovered that A.B. Whitley, a charter member who was a paint contractor, was having his crew paint the entire interior of the church. This major gift of painting the interior and exterior of the building by A. B. Whitley was repeated regularly over the years from 1967 until well into the 1990s when his health forced him to retire.¹⁴

A development that had a profound effect on the future of the church occurred during the summer of 1976 when Mrs. Jessie Lamb became the first female deacon to be elected by Oakmont. The church constitution that was adopted in 1968 had deleted the requirement that deacons must be male; yet, it was eight years before the change was actually implemented. In 1978, Mrs. Lily Weaver also was elected to the diaconate. Since that time female church members have been a constant part of the leadership for Oakmont.¹⁵

Tragedy struck the Oakmont family on February 17, 1978. Edwin E. "Ed" Rawl, Jr. and his wife Josie Barnes White "Barnie" Rawl were killed near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in the crash of his private plane. The Rawls, along with his mother Josephine and their children Eddie, Bubba, and Josie, had been charter members and mainstays of Oakmont's early development. Reverend Conklin conducted the funeral service at Oakmont to a spillover crowd of mourners.¹⁶

Denominational issues began to be of some concern

during the 1970's and continued to create discussion into the 21st century. In 1971, the North Carolina Baptist State Convention began to debate the fact that some churches accepted non-Baptist Christians into membership without requiring them to undergo immersion. The issue developed when M.O. Owens, Jr. of Gastonia offered a constitutional amendment to the Baptist State Convention that would prescribe doctrinal, ethical and cooperative requirements for convention affiliation. The proposed amendment would oust any churches which accepted non-immersed members after November 14, 1973. The proposal failed due to the constitutional requirement of a two-thirds majority for amendments. The Convention identified twelve congregations in the state (mostly larger, more urban churches) that practiced a more "inclusive" policy of membership. It created a "Committee of 11" to investigate the issue and urge baptism by immersion as the only means for full membership.¹⁷

Among the "differing" churches were Watts Street in Durham; First Church, North Wilkesboro; Olin T. Binkley Church, Chapel Hill; Pullen Memorial Church, Raleigh; St. John's, Park Road, Wedgewood, and Myers Park all in Charlotte; and Wake Forest Church in Winston-Salem. A variety of approaches were used by the twelve churches. Lakeside Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, for example, permitted membership without immersion "to persons from other denominations who were baptized by some other mode as believers in Christ as Savior." Such persons were notified when accepted into the church that their membership would not be transferable to most Baptist congregations and that fact was clearly noted on any letter of transfer requested by a sister church. Nashville Baptist Church, another member of the "differing" churches, never elected non-baptized members to serve as messengers to annual meetings of the denomination. The "Committee of 11" held a series of fact-finding meetings with the churches and in some meetings the debate became

fairly heated. Due to pressures resulting from the investigation, Aulander Baptist Church in the West Chowan Association notified the committee that it had rescinded its inclusion policy.¹⁸

Interestingly enough, Oakmont was never identified as one of the “differing” congregations. In July 1973, the deacons discussed the issue and brought a motion before the church to contact the “Committee of 11” to inform them of “Oakmont’s policy of receiving members by believer’s baptism. Specifically, ‘In keeping with the earliest Baptist tradition, we will accept a candidate’s baptism as valid if it was for him an act of obedience which followed conversion.’” After much discussion, the motion to contact the committee was defeated.¹⁹

The “Committee of 11” discussed the possibility that the Lakeside Church policy could be an acceptable compromise. It also urged churches to use associate membership rather than full membership for non-immersed members. The committee presented its report to the State Convention in 1973 without making a recommendation for action. The committee pointed out that the nature of the practice was quite limited and all of the investigated churches required immersion except in the case of believer’s baptism by some other form. Reverend Owens once again offered his constitutional amendment. This time it was overwhelmingly defeated. The issue then receded into the background.²⁰

An interesting sidelight to the baptism controversy occurred in 1977 when Reverend Conklin reported that several churches that normally sprinkle new converts, including the Episcopalians and Jarvis Memorial United Methodist Church, were using the Oakmont baptistery to immerse some new members. Gordon joked that he had taught them how to baptize.²¹

Of much greater concern to the denomination and to the future direction of the church was the conservative drift

in the Southern Baptist Convention that had become alarming during the 1970's. During 1978, Reverend Conklin taught a study on Baptist Doctrine. In August 1980, he recommended that the deacons read four articles written by Cecil Sherman, president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Dr. Sherman had written the articles specifically at the request of the *Biblical Recorder*. He addressed the fact that Southern Baptists have faced numerous controversies in the past; but, after all the discussion and debate, the issues were laid to rest and any division disappeared. The Southern Baptist Convention's meeting in St. Louis in June 1980 reflected a different kind of controversy. The argument for the complete inerrancy of the Bible moved the Convention "toward a line where our differences will overshadow the commonality of our goals." Dr. Sherman warned that the denomination could reach the point where its members could no longer work with each other. He addressed the issue of inerrancy and the claim by an element within the Baptist denomination that only conservatives believe in the Bible. This element argued that those who believe the Bible could be open to interpretation were not true believers. He denoted the widening gap within the denomination and warned that bringing the two factions back together would be very difficult. In response to this development, Rev. Conklin urged the deacons to keep themselves informed on the issues facing the denomination since it would have a direct bearing on the church's future. Due to uncertainty over the future academic/doctrinal control of Baptist institutions of higher learning, Wake Forest University sought to loosen its ties to the denomination. Despite the threat by the SBC to discontinue financial support for the institution, Oakmont voted to continue its support of Wake Forest through its Cooperative Program giving.²²

Among projects that were very dear to Rev. Conklin was the desire that Oakmont have a steeple for its sanctuary. In 1976, he requested that the Buildings and Grounds Com-

mittee be authorized to investigate the possibility of obtaining such a structure. The committee reported back that the desired steeple would cost between \$5,000 and 6,000. Since this sum was beyond the church's financial means at the time, the committee was asked to investigate possible alternatives for the project. Seven years later the dream became a reality when A.B. and Ida Whitley donated the money and the steeple was raised. It was named "The Whitley Steeple" and a plaque acknowledging the Whitley's gift was mounted near the original front door to the church.²³

During these years when budgetary funds were extremely tight, the church depended on the gifts of members for a variety of physical enhancements. Among the many notable munificences were sanctuary pews that were subscribed by a substantial number of the congregation in 1978. Choir robes were provided by Bob and Claire Holt in memory of his mother. A set of twenty-five hand-bells for a hand-bells choir was donated primarily by James H. and Polly Bearden to honor mothers on Mother's Day. These bells were officially known as the "Mother's Memorial Ministry of Bells." Also, Bruton Parish sconces for the sanctuary were provided by Greenville and Martha Banks, a new stove for the kitchen was donated by Leona "Granny" Mercer, Vernon and Frances Tyson provided a variety of furnishings from their furniture store, and Thomas Haigwood donated a cross to be mounted on a panel to cover the sanctuary baptistery.²⁴ Other furnishings, such as a grand piano, were donated anonymously, thus leaving no record of the gift.

The 1970's became a blur of activity as new programs were added and staff positions began to take form. In April 1974, the church for the first time voted to license a gospel minister in the person of Oakmont member Richard G. Jansen. In July 1974, Bible School leaders announced that enrollment for the sessions that year were up by 45%, probably the only church in the South Roanoke Baptist Association that

had an increase.²⁵

By mid-decade the youth program was making headway. The Baptist Youth Fellowship presented a Christmas drama "The Drum" for the White Christmas service in 1975 and followed it up with caroling the next night. Two years later, they attended Youth Conference Week at the N.C. Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell. That same year the group presented five performances of a musical "He Lived a Good Life." The group traveled as far away as Charlotte with their program. In 1978, a Royal Ambassador chapter was established for boys in grades 2 through 6. Junior and Senior High students traveled to Wintergreen, Virginia, for a ski trip in 1979.²⁶

As previously mentioned, the congregation followed the pastor's urging and began the employment of a series of seminary students as summer youth workers beginning in 1975. This position evolved into a year around part-time slot that was designated as Minister of Education and Youth Director. After 1980 the part-time concept was abandoned in favor of a new full-time staff position, to be implemented on June 1, 1981.²⁷

Unfortunately, the music director position was no more stable than that of the youth ministry. Dr. Charles Stevens had resigned effective January 1, 1978 and David Rockefeller assumed that position. Since the duties were only part-time, the music director slot primarily attracted university students or professionals who provided service in addition to their regular jobs. Mr. Rockefeller remained only six months before resigning to be replaced on a temporary basis by William "Bill" Frazier. Bill Frazier agreed to remain until December 1978 after which David Faber was hired as his replacement. As early as 1978, Reverend Conklin urged the congregation to think and pray about establishing a full-time Minister of Youth and Music position to replace the short-term, part-time arrangements. When Faber announced his plan to leave

Oakmont on April 30, 1981, the church was prepared to merge the music and youth programs into a single full-time staff position of Minister of Music/Youth. Before this plan could be implemented, however, the position was split into separate part-time Minister of Music and full-time Minister of Education positions.²⁸

During the summer of 1981, a committee was created and the search got underway for the church's first comprehensive staff position devoted totally to music. In September, Mrs. Treva Fidler [Fisher] was hired as Minister of Music. At the same time Steve Warren was approved as a part-time Youth Director with the understanding that at his departure a full-time Minister of Education would be sought. In June 1982 a full-time staff position, in addition to the pastor, was filled when Neil Booth was employed as Minister of Education. Booth did not remain with the church for very long. He resigned in February 1983 citing a lack of agreement with the church as to his responsibilities. Officially, "It was the feeling of both the Education Committee and Neil Booth that the needs of the church and the needs and strong points of Neil's ministry were mismatched at Oakmont Baptist Church."²⁹

After Booth's departure on April 30, 1983, a search committee focused on identifying a new Minister of Education who would bring a clear vision and order to the educational ministry of the church. The youth program was inadequately funded and lacked strong leadership. The new Minister of Education would face a program that required substantial attention and talent. At a called meeting on July 10, 1983, Gregory P. Rogers, a former summer youth worker from Raleigh, was called as Minister of Education. In 1985, the congregation voted to change Rev. Rogers' title from Minister of Education to Associate Minister for Education.³⁰

Despite continued financial difficulties the church pressed forward with new programs and the exciting potential for new growth in membership. One Sunday in Septem-

ber 1980, Reverend Conklin baptized fifteen young people; the most he had ever baptized at one time. Between January and September the church added forty new members to the congregation. In October 1981, plans got underway for a community canvas to determine prospective new members. The goal was to increase Sunday School attendance by 10% during that church year. At the same time WMU ladies voted to encourage the church membership to aim toward a goal of giving 10% of the church budget to the Cooperative Program. They suggested that the goal be reached incrementally over a period of ten years with 3% being designated during the current year and the percentage being increased steadily until the 10% was attained. Additionally, the WMU members were deeply involved in delivering meals for the Homebound Meals Program. In September, 1983, the Oakmont WMU received a special Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Organization in Pitt County in the Religious Group Category.³¹

Programs continued to grow in proportion to the increasing membership and attendance. The music program in the early 1980s had grown to the point that Oakmont boasted not only of a Chancel Choir, but Cherub, Carol, Chapel, Collegiate, Men's, and Handbell choirs as well. Despite this growth in the music program, there were serious problems that faced the leadership and the congregation. At a deacons' meeting in March 1983, concern was expressed for the unity of the church and the inability to move forward with the varying programs. "People in the church are confused about our direction." The diaconate requested that the Music Committee evaluate the church music program, the Minister of Music, and the church organist. Apparently there was concern that the music program failed to follow proper channels and as a result conflicted with other efforts and programs of the church.³²

Church Ministries United was organized in Greenville in 1982 to help local people in need of assistance. The pro-

gram was made up of Greenville churches and by the spring of 1983, fourteen churches were contributing to this work. Church Ministries United had responded to thirty-five requests for help with rent payments, eighty-four requests for help with utility bills, and twenty requests for help with emergencies for a total of \$7,667.76 during the first seven months. At Oakmont it was decided in September 1982 that a monthly communion offering would be established for a benevolent fund and shortly thereafter the church designated the offering for this effort. Early in 1983, Oakmont's share of the contributions was amounting to \$225 per month.³³

The mid-1980s saw a continuation of the growth and involvement of the past several years. Early in 1985, the church established a Wednesday Family Night program that included dinner. Both the youth and the men's groups totaling fifty-seven Oakmont participants took part in work retreats at the N.C. Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell. Annual marriage enrichment retreats at Caraway Conference Center for Oakmont couples began in 1984 and have been continued since then. The Baptist Young Women group was organized and they were directly involved with the success of the Mission Friends (for preschool boys and girls) and the activities of Girls in Action (G.A.s). By 1984, total receipts for the church reached \$153,556.42 and in 1985, the church finished the year with a positive financial balance. Between October 1984 and October 1985, Sunday School enrollment increased by seventy-two and three new adult classes were established. At that point there were 332 people enrolled in Sunday School.³⁴

This growth in Sunday School and church programs necessitated a discussion of growing space concerns. On February 12, 1984, the diaconate met in Rawl Parlor and recommended that a building committee be reactivated to explore future building needs of the church. Not since the construction of the original Oakmont structure had a building com-

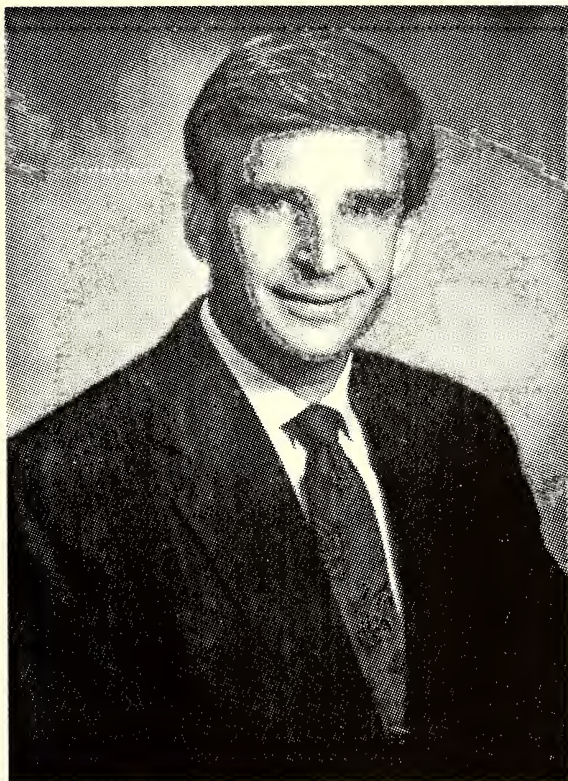
mittee been needed by the church. By 1985, a move got underway to purchase mobile units to relieve the classroom crisis. Also, the Building Committee recommended construction of a new sanctuary to seat 750 people, along with permanent church offices, and sufficient classrooms to cover growth for the next ten years. The plan would call for the conversion of the original sanctuary into a fellowship hall or family life center, as originally envisioned by the charter members.³⁵

Early in 1986, the architectural firm of Dudley and Shoe was retained to plan Phase I of a new Sanctuary/Educational Space/Office Space. At the same time a motion, introduced by Mrs. Alice Dickens, was approved that the church body tithe 10% of the total church budget to the Cooperative Program, fulfilling a vision that had been long awaiting.³⁶

On April 25, 1986, Reverend Gordon Conklin announced his retirement effective July 31. It was apparent to his wife and some of his closest friends that the pastor's health was failing. It was not until after his retirement that he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Reverend Conklin's condition continued to deteriorate until his death on June 19, 1996.³⁷

CHAPTER III

THE ROGERS YEARS



Dr. Gregory P. Rogers, pastor 1986 - present

On June 18, 1986, a pastor search committee was named to find a replacement for Reverend Conklin. Less than three months later, the pastor search committee, diaconate, finance committee, and personnel committee joined to propose that the church call Reverend Gregory P. Rogers, the Associate Minister for Education, as the new pastor. Greg accepted the offer and became pastor effective October 1.¹

Gregory P. Rogers was a native of Raleigh. He received a B.A. degree in philosophy and religion in 1979 from North Carolina State University. During his college years he had worked as a summer youth worker at Creedmoor Road Baptist Church in 1975 and at Oakmont in 1976 and 1977. While here he met Leslie Dickens, a member of an Oakmont family, and they were married in August 1978. Greg had received the Master of Divinity (M. Div.) degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and had served as Director of Youth and Christian Education at Garner United Methodist Church before joining the Oakmont staff in 1983 as Minister of Education. During his early years as pastor of Oakmont, he attended graduate school at Southeastern and received his Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) degree in 1990. Among numerous distinctions in his resume, he has served on the board of directors (and board chair) of the *Biblical Recorder*, member of the general board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, member of the national board of directors of the N.C. State University Alumni Association, and board member and president of the Greenville Community Shelters. In 2004, he received a 14 week sabbatical in conjunction with a Lily Endowment grant for \$41,000 from their National Clergy Renewal program. Only eight such awards were made in North Carolina and 117 nationally.²

As 1986 faded into the new year, Oakmont continued to work on outreach and growth. The church budget approved for 1987 totaled \$190,150. Attendance for February 1, 1987, totaled 254 for worship and 203 for Sunday School. The Associate Minister for Education position was filled by LaCount Anderson, which brought the church ministerial staff back to its full complement. Also in 1987, the building committee had decided on construction of a new educational wing as its top priority, thus postponing plans for a new sanctuary until Phase III of the master plan. With a clear vision for the future, a major capital improvements campaign got underway

under the name of "Together We Build." Greenville and Martha Banks accepted the responsibility for chairing this and two additional "Together We Build" efforts. The firm of George Shoe, Architect was employed early in 1989 to prepare plans for the new educational facility. During the 25th Anniversary celebration in 1989, a love gift was received by the church that paid off the last of its indebtedness leaving the church debt free on the verge of its new building campaign.³

Growth in enrollment and financial support reached new levels by late in the 1980's. In the fall of 1987, teachers and workers set an enrollment goal of 465 people in Bible Study (Sunday School) for October 1, 1988. Remarkably, the enrollment reached 477 by the end of 1987. Sunday School attendance and the formation of new classes had reached such a point by early 1988 that a second modular unit was approved to relieve the space problems. The finance committee set the 1988 budget at \$217,532. When the pledge cards were returned, the budget was oversubscribed by \$5,914.⁴

A multitude of mission and church-related activities kept the members busy during 1988. The Men's Brotherhood made a work trip to Mars Hill College to help construct a new chapel. The youth participated in a ski retreat at Wintergreen, Virginia, and a Backyard Bible Class in Grandview, West Virginia. Also, the church agreed to support the Little River Baptist Church in Belfort, Maine, by purchasing literature for the church. Oakmont hosted the South Roanoke Baptist Association meeting for the first time in 1988. Additionally, a motion was approved to support a deaf ministry at Oakmont. In the fall of 1988, Reverend Rogers proposed that the church begin two church services each Sunday morning beginning in November.⁵

Two projects undertaken in 1988 became realities early in 1989. A committee began work on incorporation documents that would protect the financial security of the church.

Additionally, the congregation joined with First Baptist Church of Farmville and Immanuel Baptist Church in Greenville in sponsoring a new mission church to be located on Stantonsburg Road on the western fringe of the city. The Oakmont incorporation was completed without significant problems on January 4, 1989 when the congregation voted to dissolve the church and reestablish it as Oakmont Baptist Church, Inc.⁶ The sponsorship of the new mission church, however, was fraught with much more frustration.

As a means of support for the new mission church, Oakmont initially committed \$250 per month from the church budget and at least \$100 per month from the communion offering. What was first known as the Stantonsburg Road Mission Church began services on January 15, 1989. By April 12, seventy-three people were present for services and seven had been baptized. The mission struggled, however, and the name was soon changed to Medical Center Mission Church. Finances were a critical problem, especially in terms of affording a pastor and land on which to build a facility. By October 1992, First Baptist Church in Farmville arranged for the donation of land for the church on Stantonsburg Road and the mission church employed its first full-time pastor. Although it moved into a modular unit on the property, the prospects for success still appeared weak. The Oakmont leadership urged some of its members to attend the new church and even to change their membership to that body. Sunday school classes were asked to convene there on specified Sundays in an effort to increase attendance and to provide an example for the Medical Center Mission congregation.⁷

As conditions continued to deteriorate Oakmont deacons met with their counterparts at Immanuel early in 1994 to discuss how the churches should proceed with the effort to successfully develop the new mission. Only isolated members from either church had been willing to move to the mission church. The Medical Center Mission Church lacked lead-

ership, financially supportive members, and members experienced in the operation of a church. The pastor's salary was behind by \$3,300 by halfway through 1994 and nothing had been paid toward his retirement. Early in 1995, the mission church was renamed Westpointe Baptist Church. Yet, regular attendance had dropped to an average of 18 to 20 people. The Oakmont deacons voted to stop funding the mission church effective December 1995. According to Reverend Rogers, the Medical Center Mission ultimately failed because it never had a critical core group that was willing to stay with it on a long-term basis. It was dependent primarily on unchurched people for its membership and they had no experience in how a church functioned. The mission's minister had no experience in "growing" a church. It lacked lay leadership and the congregation did not blend well. Oakmont had spent between \$30,000 and \$35,000 on this mission effort. It had become obvious that long-term financial support from sponsoring churches was not the answer. One Oakmont member commented that the popular perception was that "it was white collar people trying to establish a church for a blue collar membership." Regardless, the experiment failed and the mission closed.⁸

Just as Gordon Conklin had viewed the fundamentalist drift of the Southern Baptist Convention with alarm in the period beginning in 1979, Dr. Rogers expressed grave concerns a decade later about the direction of the SBC. Writing in *Tower Topics* on June 24, 1990, some months after attending the Convention meeting in New Orleans, he commented on the changes in Southern Baptist theology and summed up his concerns when he wrote:

What bothers me the most about our present Convention leadership is that unless you and I share their exact interpretation of the Bible, we're not considered Bible-believing Baptists. The parameters and scope of acceptable theology has been narrowed toward a creedal interpretation of the Christian experience, something Baptists have discouraged since our beginnings in seventeenth century England.

I have sought to educate our church family in a low-key approach regarding the nature of the SBC controversy. I have not wanted to distract us from what our basic purpose as a church is—to reach people for Jesus Christ. Yet the events of the last several days of our convention have persuaded me that Oakmont must understand even clearer the repercussions this movement has had in our convention and will have on the local church in the years to come. I plan to suggest some ideas to our Diaconate in their July meeting on how we might address these concerns.⁹

In August, the church formally established the Denominational Relations Committee to follow the current crisis in the SBC and to keep members informed. The committee was charged to report to the church on a regular basis. By December, Greg commented that he was “thankful for a church where the autonomy of the local church is exercised and where the priesthood of the believer is permitted.”¹⁰

In March 1991, the membership passed a resolution protesting a Sunday School lesson published by the Sunday School Board of the SBC entitled “Respect for Human Life.” The Resolution, drafted by the Denominational Relations Committee, pointed out that the lesson concentrated only on the abortion issue and did not deal with such other relevant questions as capital punishment, euthanasia, war and peace, etc. The lesson drew only one conclusion and did not provide any opportunity for discussion. If anything, the lesson dealt a blow to the Baptist concept of “priesthood of the believer.”¹¹

The following year, as the SBC continued its move toward the right, the Denominational Relations Committee sponsored a forum held jointly by Oakmont, Immanuel, and First churches of Farmville, Plymouth, and Washington. Featured speakers were Dr. R. Gene Puckett (longtime editor of the *Biblical Recorder*) and Dr. Henry Crouch (of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond). They provided information and answered questions about the denominational experience and what was happening to the Southern Baptist Convention. Shortly thereafter, Reverend Rogers, once again using *Tower Topics* as his forum, wrote that.

We must be concerned about the direction of our convention, and we must not forget our students who, in the midst of their theological education, are the sad victims of this entire affair. Thirteen years ago, many laypeople in churches like Oakmont were convinced the squabble was just a preachers' fight and would have no impact on local churches. But with Sunday School Board material changing, foreign missionaries resigning or considering that possibility, and a new brand of graduates emerging from SBC seminaries we have always trusted, it's time for churches and lay people to pull their heads from the sand and look at the new landscape being fashioned before our very eyes.¹²

In 1993, the Denominational Relations Committee presented an informational video on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and proposed changing the current method of distributing Cooperative Program Funds. Under this option Oakmont would minimize its contributions to the Southern Baptist Convention and channel funds toward the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in order to support its missions program. The church approved these recommendations, thus changing its relationship with and financial support for the Southern Baptist Convention.¹³

Oakmont's participation in denominational affairs continued to take a decided turn toward the CBF, after the church's messengers began to attend CBF meetings in lieu of participation in SBC meetings. The final blow to relationships with the SBC came in 2000 when the Convention revised the Baptist Faith and Message that had served the denomination since 1925 with minor changes in 1963. Over sixty Oakmonters participated in a Wednesday evening forum to discuss the recently adopted revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message. The pastor followed up the forum with a column in *Tower Topics* expressing his view on the changes. In part, he noted that "Baptist have disliked creeds which create tight theological boxes and cancel out the priesthood of the believer and the God-given gift of soul competency. . . . messengers made the current BF&M more into a creed than they would care to admit, forfeiting the birthright of what dissenting English Baptists fought for in the 17th century-freedom of conscience and soul competency."¹⁴

Dr. Rogers went on to explain that "to be considered a good Baptist, churches and individuals must affirm the new BF&M as handed down from the SBC leadership. . . . the revised BF&M places the Bible above Jesus himself." It replaces the wording "'the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ' with 'all scripture is a testimony to Christ, who himself is the focus of divine revelation.'"¹⁵

In conclusion, he noted that "I believe the best hope for Baptists in the future is with other local churches like ours who are networking to do missions, evangelism, and ministry through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The CBF has realized that individual loyalty to denominational structure no longer exists, making it a bureaucratic dinosaur. . . ."¹⁶

Dr. Rogers replaced denominational involvement with a strong emphasis on lay missions and on spirituality as the central focus for the congregation. For the church's 25th An-

niversary celebration in 1989, Oakmont selected the theme "Connecting Lives-With Christ As the Center." This phrase remained with the church as a motto and reflected the efforts of the church leadership. During the next fifteen years, hundreds of members undertook a wide range of Bible study, medical, and construction trips to needy locations around the nation and around the world. Included were one or more projects in Africa, Kosovo, India, Alaska, Honduras, Poland, and the Ukraine. Youth teams traveled to Georgia, Washington, DC, Alaska, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and New York primarily to conduct backyard Bible clubs and teach Bible school. Closer to home, Baptist Men participated in flood relief in eastern North Carolina after the devastating flood associated with Hurricane Floyd. Oakmont men were active with the Baptist Men's Disaster Relief van and the Baptist Men's Medical/Dental van whenever the need arose. They also gathered and shipped twenty-eight boxes of dried food for North Korea and a significant quantity of food for Honduras.¹⁷

The congregation reached out in a variety of ways to each other and to people outside of the church. Oakmont ranked ninth in North Carolina in training course completions for 1989. During the following year, the church held a lay evangelism school to teach lay persons to share their faith. As a result, the Southern Baptist Convention ranked Oakmont as fifth in the denomination in church study courses in the area of Evangelism and Witness. In 1992, the church undertook "Touch 92," a ministry designed to reach out to other Oakmont members and a Lay Institute study provided a L.I.F.E. series of courses for equipping members to share with others. In 1994, church members participated in "Crop Walk for World Hunger" and the following year the WMU was involved in "Project HELP: Hunger" collecting food and money for hunger relief. By 1998, deacons and other church leaders attended a Spirituality Retreat at Caraway Conference Center in Asheboro. The following year Oakmont mem-

bers and church leaders began participating in annual spirituality retreats at Caraway. With this experience by church leaders and members, spiritual formation groups were established within the church and members of the congregation were better prepared to reach out to the community and the nation.¹⁸

The Oakmont family was deeply involved in a variety of local ministries as the new millennium arrived. In 1996, Church Ministries United was dissolved as a conduit for charitable service. The Oakmont congregation decided to divide its communion offerings with 90% going to the Greenville Community Shelter and 10% going to the Pitt County Council on Aging. This was amended a year later to provide 45% of communion offerings for the community shelter, 45% to the Emergency Assistance Ministry, and 10% for the Council on Aging. Again, in 2002, the communion offering was adjusted to provide 75% for the Greenville Community Shelter, 15% for the church benevolent fund, and 10% for the Council on Aging.¹⁹

In hands-on local ministries, church members became involved with the Pitt County Chapter of Habitat for Humanity, providing teams to work every Saturday in June 1998 on construction of a house. Over 110 volunteers from Oakmont were involved in the project. The following year the church participated in the “Building on Faith” program for Habitat. Again in 2000, Oakmont joined with First Christian and Memorial Baptist churches to sponsor a Habitat project as part of the “Building on Faith” initiative and as part of Operation Inasmuch. During September 2001, teams worked for Habitat every Saturday. Operation Inasmuch had been established as an on-going inter-congregational effort to reach the local community through volunteer assistance projects. On one Saturday each year, in addition to Habitat, teams from Memorial, First Christian, and Oakmont spread out across the city building handicap access ramps, packaging potatoes for

charitable distribution, providing programs for retirement homes, performing repairs to homes and yards, and a variety of other needed services. In 2003, local mission projects included working with Building Hope Community Life Center, Grifton Flood Recovery Work, Habitat For Humanity, Backyard Bible Clubs, Carolina Pregnancy Center, Take It To the Streets Ministry, the Food Bank of North Carolina, nursing home visitation, and assisting with the Council on Aging.²⁰

In other ministry efforts, the church adopted a Bosnian refugee family who came to Greenville to flee the war that was ravaging the Balkans at the time. In 2002, it sponsored two Mongolian children who had traveled to Greenville for major heart surgery. Oakmont had also become a major sponsor of the HIS Right Hand mission program for youth in 2000. Locally, Oakmont was involved in disaster recovery after Hurricane Floyd, adopting two families that were victims; the youth participated in flood relief and backyard Bible clubs; and the congregation teamed up with Memorial church members to provide post-disaster relief mission camps in Greenville.²¹

During this period Reverend Rogers led the church toward a more ecumenical understanding of their faith. In an effort to learn more about other faith traditions, a group of members in 1995 attended services on Wednesday evening at St. Peter's Catholic Church. In 2002, the church participated in an Easter service "Stations of the Cross" at St. Peter's. Beginning in 1999, the pastor initiated a series of programs as part of the adult Vacation Bible School. Presentations were given on Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal Holiness, Episcopal, and Christian denominational doctrines and practices. In 2000, the study was directed toward the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon faiths. The effort was expanded beyond the Christian institutions in 2001 when Judaism and Islam were featured and in 2002 when Hindu-

ism was studied. With each of the non-Christian faiths, the programs included field trips to the synagogue, mosques, and temples involved. A spokesman for each religion explained their doctrine and concepts and responded to questions from the Oakmont members.²²

Just as church traditions had developed under previous pastors, new initiatives became a reality during the Rogers years. In 1987, the Hanging of the Green[s] Ceremony helped to usher in the Advent season and by 1997 decorating the chancel area with donated poinsettias complemented the greenery. A special Taize service was added to the Advent celebration in 2001, bringing new meaning and reverence to the season.²³

Along with the growth in numbers and in spiritual effectiveness during this period, the music and drama programs provided a vibrant and effective voice for the ministry effort. In 1991, the Chancel Choir, consisting of fifty-two members, presented the musical "Jericho." In 1994, two new adult ensembles, "Highest Praise" and "Joyful Sounds," were formed as was the "Symphony of Praise" orchestra. The ensembles performed before groups throughout the region and in December 1998, they were invited to sing at the White House. Two years later they sang at the Biltmore Estate near Asheville. The choirs and ensembles, along with the church orchestra, provide a highly meaningful music ministry for church services as well as at various venues outside of the Oakmont family. For example, the Prime Timers Choir (now known as the JOY Singers) performs at nursing/retirement homes in the area on a regular basis.²⁴

To complement the music ministry, the "Revelation Players" drama group was formed late in 1993. In addition to performances during worship services, the drama team presented dinner and dessert theater performances such as "Catacombs" in 1998, "A Rock and a Hard Place" in 1999, and "Out of the Whirlwind" in 2001.²⁵

With all of the activities surrounding Oakmont during these years, substantial growth was an important factor in its ability to accomplish so much. By October 1998, the total membership had reached 1004. The church had grown 300% between 1986 and 1998. This necessitated the beginning of two worship services and two Sunday School services by the beginning of 1991. Less than seven years later, it was necessary to establish three worship services each Sunday morning. In 1995, Oakmont produced a series of television ads for local public service announcements to increase awareness of the church and its programs and in 1999 it began broadcasting Sunday morning services on cable Channel 7. This was made possible through the benevolence of Oakmont member and TV channel owner Henry Hinton and New East Communications. This new outreach tool made it possible for Oakmont to come into homes all over the Greenville viewing area. As a move to increase member commitment and involvement, the church late in 1999 decided to convert from a committee structure to that of volunteer teams. Although the change was made on an experimental basis, it was so successful that the team structure was continued.²⁶

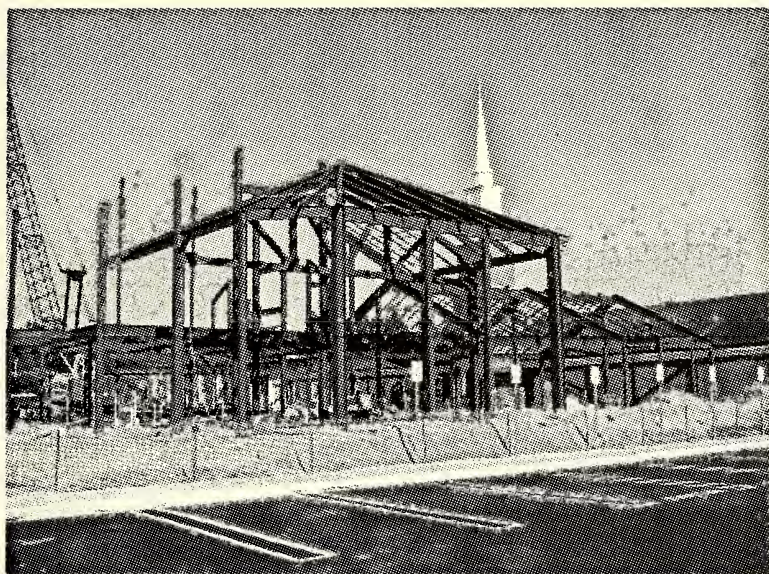
The growth in membership and programs were in part the result of attracting a committed and talented ministerial staff. When LaCount Anderson resigned in 1993 to accept the position of Associate Minister at First Christian Church in Washington, N.C., it provided the church with an opportunity to realign its staffing needs. Michael McKnight, a gifted pianist and choir leader, accepted the call to become Minister of Music in 1993. The following year Beth Thompson was called as Minister of Education; and in 1996, Layne Rogerson became Minister of Youth and College Students. In 2002, Steve Harding accepted the newly created position of Minister of Media, Arts and Children. Although Reverend Rogerson resigned in 2003, this staff was instrumental in supporting the pastor in leading the congregation in a vast array of pro-

grams.²⁷

Considering the rapid development of Oakmont over the years, the physical facilities for the church were inadequate for the congregation. During the mid-1980s plans had begun for Phase II of the church's master building plan and a "Together We Build" program chaired by Greenville and Martha Banks was put in place to raise capital improvement funds. This program was a concentrated effort to encourage members to pledge funds over a three-year period. After the initial TWB program was successfully completed, a second campaign was undertaken in 1990. The idea was to accumulate funds that would minimize the necessity for extensive borrowing when construction of a new educational wing and fellowship hall got underway.²⁸

The construction plan as unveiled in 1992 called for the construction of a new fellowship hall that would seat 250 people, a new educational facility that would have twelve classrooms, a drive-through carport, seventy-seven new parking spaces, and extensive landscaping. The plan also called for the current room that was being used for a fellowship hall to be renovated for the choir and that a current classroom would be changed to house the library/media center. In all, the addition would double the size of the original facility. The contract was awarded to J.H. Hudson in the amount of \$1,242,060 and the groundbreaking services were held on March 22, 1992. The new addition was completed during the spring of 1993 and the space was occupied on Saturday April 17. The dedication service was held on May 2, 1993.²⁹

Within days of dedicating the new educational facilities, the diaconate began to discuss plans for a new sanctuary. The planning remained low key until the spring of 1995 when a Preliminary Sanctuary Study Committee reported on their progress toward planning the new structure. They recommended a sanctuary with a capacity that would seat between 750 and 1000 persons at a cost of between 1.2 million



Construction on the new worship center, c.2001

and 1.5 million dollars. Mrs. Debi Lee was selected as chair of the Building Committee with Mel Dickens serving as vice-chairman. The congregation approved building the new sanctuary complex and more detailed planning began. In October 1995, the congregation approved a new TWB fundraising effort. With its completion in 1999, a fourth fundraising program was undertaken that was called "Completing the Vision." The church employed ADW Architects, P.A. of Charlotte to design the new "worship center" and selected Farrior and Sons, Inc. of Farmville as the general contractor. On April 29, 2001, the groundbreaking ceremony was held and members of the Greenville community looked on with wonder as the construction progressed. As the work advanced a fifth and final capital campaign, labeled "Be a Part of HIStory" and chaired by Joe and Sharron Edwards, was undertaken. This effort provided funds to reduce the mortgage loan for the complex. When the structure was completed, it actually

contained almost 28,000 square feet of space with a seating capacity in the sanctuary for almost 1,000 persons. The entire “worship center” complex, along with renovations to the earlier building, cost a total of \$5.7 million. Of that the church only had to borrow \$2.9 million.³⁰



New worship center takes form, 2002

The first service in the new sanctuary occurred on October 5, 2003 with 945 people in attendance. Dedication of the facility was held two weeks later on October 19. Instead of depending on guest speakers to lead the service, the pastor delivered the sermon entitled “Making the Main Thing the Main Thing.” The combined children’s choirs presented an anthem “It Takes a Team;” the Revelation Players performed “Worship, Etc. Ditto;” and the Chancel Choir presented the church’s commissioned anthem “Circle of Love.” A catered luncheon was served immediately after the services concluded.³¹



Oakmont Baptist Church, 2003

Although the new sanctuary building was a major landmark in the church's development, it was not a signal for the church family to rest on its laurels or slow their pace of spiritual development. Once again in 2003, Oakmont exceeded its budget with total receipts of \$1,182,383.70, not including a variety of special offerings collected during the year and building fund gifts for the new sanctuary. Also of significance for 2003 was the receipt of the "Outstanding Congregation Award. . . In Recognition of Exemplary Support and Concern for Homeless People in North Carolina." The award was issued to Oakmont Baptist Church by the N.C. Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs.

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During the spring of 2004, Oakmont joined in the "40 Days of Purpose" program that was sweeping the nation. Copies of Rick Warren's book of the same name were given to each church family and church members gathered weekly

to discuss each chapter. At the same time the church pressed forward with a missions and ministry fair to emphasize local opportunities for volunteers to minister to others through teams and individual service.³³



Services underway in the new sanctuary, 2003

Oakmont did not celebrate its fortieth anniversary on the Sunday closest to April 26, the founding date of the church. The celebration was combined with several other events and was held on May 16. Not only did the church honor its founding, it served as an opportunity to celebrate Pastor Greg Rogers' twentieth anniversary and Minister of Education Beth Thompson's tenth anniversary at Oakmont. Additionally, the service was utilized to bid Dr. Rogers farewell as he departed for a 14 week sabbatical.³⁴

EPILOGUE

Looking forward to the future of Oakmont Baptist Church, the ministry program immediately began to plan for the next forty years. During a ministry celebration on April 25, 2004, the congregation approved a variety of recommendations that will have profound implications for the future. Mrs. Amy Andrews was called as the new Minister of Youth and College; the congregation approved a move to two worship services and three Sunday School services each Sunday morning beginning January 9, 2005. The 9:40 a.m. service will continue to be a blended service that will be televised to air at 11:00 a.m. on Cable Channel 7 and a new 11:00 a.m. service will feature a contemporary emphasis that will draw from an “emerging” worship perspective. Of major significance was the adoption of an Associate Pastor position for the church with Minister of Education Beth Thompson selected to fill this new post. The search for a new Minister of Education was approved to commence immediately, and on April 17, 2005, the Rev. Stephan B. Prevatte was called as Minister of Education. He began his ministry at Oakmont on June 5, 2005. Additionally, the congregation approved the preparation of a job description for a Minister of Administration position. This individual would be responsible for all business and physical aspects of the church’s operation. The concept of providing a sabbatical leave every five years for ministerial staff was also approved. In addition to the ministerial staff, the support staff includes three secretaries, a music assistant, paid pianist and organist, three sextons, and a food services director.¹

The pastor already has a multitude of other plans for Oakmont's future. The approved church budget for 2005 stands at \$1,430,000 and the membership as Oakmont begins its 41st year consists of 1,259 members. Arrangements were made and later completed to provide renewed emphasis on practicing the Sabbath for Vacation Bible School in 2004. Also, a Spirituality Retreat was offered during 2005 that focused on "Sabbath in our lives." Another major event planned for 2005 was Oakmont's hosting of the annual meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.²

Although the church added 28,000 square feet of space to its physical plant during the past year, there is already a need for more space for offices, classrooms, parking, and other uses. A ministry team is exploring the possibility of acquiring needed property contiguous to the present church campus. If this effort is successful, it could possibly lead to the creation of a ministry village which could, among other things, provide space for construction of a family life center, offer additional education facilities, and possibly provide apartment space for visiting missionaries, ministerial interns, and other guests.³

The first forty years have been an incredible journey made possible by 42 totally committed charter members who envisioned a ministry of faith and love. God brought to their door three gifted ministers who shared their belief in what Oakmont Baptist Church could represent to Greenville and the world at large. Fortunately, this basis attracted a growing congregation who was of like mind and spirit. Thus, God's Oakmont Idea is now poised for even greater service in the years to come.

NOTES

Chapter I

1. Hugh Wease. *A Journey of Faith: The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, North Carolina, 1827-2002*. (Baptist History and Heritage Society, Brentwood, Tennessee and Fields Publishing, Incorporated, Nashville, Tennessee, 2002) pp. 64, 97, 100.

2. E. R. "Pete" and Grace Carraway oral interview with the author, January 14, 2004; Robert L. Holt oral interview with the author, March 20, 2004; Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964, originals of all Claire Holt letters in possession of Dr. Robert L. Holt, Darlington, SC.

3. Wease, pp. 97-100; Carraway interview.

4. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], March 31, 1964; Carraway interview; Holt interview.

5 1964 was during the midst of the Civil Rights movement and the future Oakmont leadership was anxious to invite African Americans into their congregation. When Bob Holt proposed integration of Memorial at a deacons' meeting earlier in the year, he was informed by one deacon that to his way of thinking "this church is a club and we set our rules for membership." Holt interview.

6. Claire Holt letters to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], March 31, 1964, April 10, 1964, April 18, 1964; Carraway interview; Holt interview.

7. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964.

8. Carraway interview; Holt interview.

9. Hurt feelings did not mend quickly. On the first anniversary of Oakmont's establishment, a program was printed that contained a brief church history written by Claire Holt and Peg Haigwood. The final paragraph made reference to "a few regrettable misunderstandings. . . among some of the members of the mother church." In a letter to her mother shortly thereafter, Mrs. Holt reported that "We understand some Memorial people resented the last paragraph of our history of the church, which one or two had seen somewhere. So they had a called deacons' meeting about it and their chairman is to see our chairman (who is Bob) to bring

some sort of censure... . We had a distinct purpose in adding the final paragraph. New members have asked questions and some prospects have told us recently of some Memorial people raising question in their minds about the new 'off brand' church. Though we had no desire to keep old wounds open, we felt that honesty and truth were needed." Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], (May 1965) Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964; Carraway interview.

10. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964.

11. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, May 6, 1964; Carraway interview; Wease, p.100.

12. Grace Carraway letter to Percy Upchurch, April 26, 1964, printed in *Tower Topics* (Oakmont Baptist Church newsletter), April 17, 1994.

13. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964.

14. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 26, 1964; Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 28, 1964.

15. Holt interview; Carraway interview. Lily Weaver had suggested that the congregation refer to themselves as "The New Baptist Church" until a permanent name was chosen; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 29, 1964.

16 Minutes of the Deacons, April 3, 1966; *Oakmont Messenger*, October 16, 1964; Carraway interview.

17.Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, November 30, 1967; Charles Stevens oral interview with the author May 4, 2004, Carraway interview; Minutes of the Deacons, June, 5, 1966.

18. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 29, 1964. Although Kenneth Mercer was originally elected as trustee, he had withdrawn from that post before October 16, 1964 and Vernon Tyson was named as his replacement *Oakmont Messenger*, October 16, 1964.

19. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, May 13, 1964; June 17, 1964; *Oakmont Messenger* December 12, 1964; Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], June 1, 1964; June 17, 1964; *Daily Reflector* (Greenville, NC newspaper), December 18, 1964.

20. Carraway interview; Holt interview..

21. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, June 3, 1964; Carraway interview; Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], April 18, 1964.

22. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, June 17, 1964. The motion specifically called for the name of the church to include "The" in its title. Previously A.B. Whitley had suggested that the church be given a family name in exchange for a gift of \$50,000, but a motion quickly passed prohibiting such a policy. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], undated; Holt interview; Carraway interview.

23. Oakmont Baptist Church Building Plan, n.d.

24. *The Oakmont Messenger*, October 2, 1964; Carraway interview; Holt interview.

25. Holt interview; Carraway interview.

26. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], December 11, 1964, *Oakmont Messenger*, December 18, 1964.

27. *Oakmont Messenger*, October 2, 1964; December 18, 1964; February 5, 1965; March 19, 1965; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, July 29, 1964; "The First Anniversary: Oakmont Baptist Church," program April 25, 1965.

28. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, June 8, 1966.

29. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, March 9, 1966; Minutes of the Deacons, March 6, 1966; May 1, 1966; Carraway interview.

30. Minutes of the Deacons, October 2, 1966; May 7, 1967; Claire Holt, "Chronological History of Oakmont Baptist Church," (1974), pp. 3-4; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, October 24, 1965; August 14, 1966; James H. Bearden oral history interview with the author, April 15, 2004; Claire Holt to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], August 9, 1966; "\$200,000 Bond Issue" booklet, Oakmont Baptist Church, November 8, 1965; "\$50,000 Bond Program" booklet, Oakmont Baptist Church, January 20, 1967..

31 Minutes of the Deacons, July 9, 1967, September 10, 1967, October 8, 1967; *Tower Topics*, August 18, 1967.

32. Claire Holt, "Chronological History," p. 4; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, October 11, 1972; March 2, 1975. *Oakmont Messenger*, October 22, 1965. Jeanne Clayton Conklin oral history interview with the author, February 24, 2004.

33. Claire Holt, "Chronological History," p. 5
34. *Oakmont Messenger*, April 1968.
35. "Within These Walls: The Furnishing Needs of Oakmont Baptist Church," (furnishings catalog); Stevens interview; Plaque attached to original church organ.
36. Constitution of Oakmont Baptist Church, 1968; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, March 3, 1968; Minutes of the Deacons, August 6, 1967; Claire Holt to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], July 12, 1967.
37. Constitution of Oakmont Baptist Church; Minutes of the Deacons, September 18, 1966.
38. Minutes of the Deacons, September 14, 1969, February 8, 1970, April 12, 1970, June 14, 1970, October 11, 1970, February 10, 1971; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 15, 1970.
39. Gregory P. Rogers oral history interview with the author, February 3, 2004; Holt interview; "God's Oakmont Idea: A Special Family," video (1994 edition).
40. Claire Holt, "Chronological History," p. 6.
41. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, August 14, 1966, February 2, 1969, April 16, 1969, October 12, 1969, January 4, 1970, April 15, 1970, May 10, 1970, July 14, 1971; Minutes of the Deacons, September 18, 1966, October 2, 1966, May 7, 1967, July 13, 1969, August 10, 1969; Holt interview.
42. Minutes of the Deacons, March 14, 1971; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church April 4, 1971; Carraway interview; Holt interview. After Rev. Payne left Pactolus Baptist Church, he rejoined Oakmont as a member until he and his family left Greenville.

Chapter II

1. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 26, 1964; October 10, 1971; Carraway interview.
2. Conklin interview; *Tower Topics* (church newsletter), July 29, 1986. The original church newsletter, *Oakmont Messenger*, apparently was discontinued in 1968 and resumed

in September 1972 as *Tower Topics*.

3. Conklin interview; Bearden interview; Rogers interview.

4. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, February 7, 1973.

5. Conklin interview; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, January 7, 1976..

6. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 16, 1975, July 7, 1976, April 17, 1977, April 5, 1978, October 1, 1980, February 4, 1981; Minutes of the Deacons, March 12, 1978.

7. Claire Holt letter to [Mabel Clyde Hardin], undated [early 1972?]

8. Conklin interview; *Tower Topics*, April 1, 1973.

9. *Tower Topics*, September 9, 1973; Conklin interview.

10. Conklin interview; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, January 7, 1976.

11. Conklin interview.

12. Greenville and Martha Banks oral interview with the author, March 1, 2004; Bearden interview.

13. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, April 12, 1972, April 4, 1990; Lily Weaver, informal conversation with the author, October 24, 2004.

14. Conklin interview; Carraway interview; *Tower Topics*, December 6, 1972, March 1, 1974, January 1983; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, January 9, 1980.

15. Minutes of the Deacons, November 14, 1976, July 9, 1978.

16. *Daily Reflector* (Greenville, NC), February 19, 1978, pp.1-2; Minutes of the Deacons, July 9, 1978.

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30. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, July 10, 1983, May 1, 1985; Minutes of the Deacons, April 6, 1983, June 28, 1983, February 10, 1985.

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4. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, October 11, 1987, January 24, 1988; *Tower Topics*, October 4, 1987, November 1, 1987.

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18. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, January 3, 1990; *Tower Topics*, December 17, 1989, June 24, 1990, January 5, 1992; February 9, 1992, January 15, 1995; Minutes of the Deacons, November 16, 1997.

19. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, November 10, 1996, October 4, 1997; Minutes of the Deacons, March 15, 1992, April 21, 2002.

20. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, July 22, 1998, September 20, 1998; *Tower Topics*, March 2, 1996; May 17, 1998; January 10, 1999; May 30, 1999; August 15, 1999; October 3, 1999; June 11, 2000; September 10, 2000; August 5, 2001; September 2, 2001; November 17, 2002; April 13, 2003; Minutes of the Deacons, April 16, 2000.

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the Deacons, June 11, 2000.

23. *Tower Topics*, November 11, 1987, November 23, 1997; December 16, 2001.

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25. *Tower Topics*, December 14, 1993, October 30, 1994; April 13, 1997; April 5, 1998; October 31, 1999; October 28, 2001.

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27. Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, March 28, 1993, March 27, 1994, June 23, 1996; *Tower Topics*, April 4, 1993; Minutes of the Deacons, March 20, 1994, June 2, 1996, April 21, 2002.

28. Minutes of the Deacons, March 8, 1987; February 16, 1992; Minutes of Oakmont Baptist Church, July 15, 1989; *Tower Topics*, August 20, 1989; Banks interview.

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31. "Sanctuary Dedication Service," Oakmont Baptist Church Bulletin, October 19, 2003; *Tower Topics*, October 12-18, 2003.

32. *Tower Topics*, January 4—January 10, 2004; Award plaque in Church office.

33. *Tower Topics*, December 21, 2003-January 3, 2004, January 4-10, 2004; "You Were Made for a Mission: You Were Shaped for a Ministry," Missions Ministry Fair booklet, March 28, 2004.

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2. Minutes of the Deacons, August 3, 2003; Rogers interview.

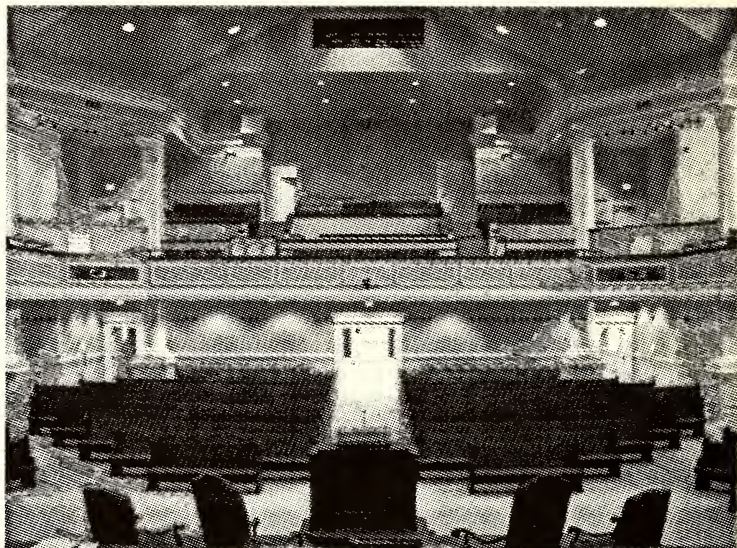
3. Minutes of the Deacons, January 19, 2003, April 27, 2003; Rogers interview.

APPENDIX I

Charter Members:

Mrs. Grace Carraway
E. R. ["Pete"] Carraway
Robert Carraway
Ernest Carraway
Becky Holt
Susan Holt
Jim Holt
Mrs. Claire Holt
Robert L. Holt
Betty Lee Carr
Mrs. Lily R. Weaver
F. Milan Johnson

Mrs. Elizabeth Pate Johnson
Mrs. Bert G. Tyson
Mrs. Helen S. Berryman
Henry Berryman
Dottie Berryman
Barbara Berryman
Mrs. Mary Gay [Peg] Haigwood
Gay Haigwood
T. J. Haigwood
Mrs. Melva Barton
Dan M. Barton
Mrs. Lucy W. Humphrey
Mrs. Eleanor Mercer
Kenneth H. Mercer
Daniel James Cain
William E. Cain, Jr.
Mrs. Donna Cain Graham
Mrs. Keith Downing Cain
W. Ed Cain
W. Vernon Tyson
Mrs. Frances C. Tyson
W. Vernon Tyson, Jr.
Mrs. Josephine L. Rawl
Mrs. Josie White Rawl
Eddie Rawl
Ed E. Rawl, Jr.
A. B. Whitley, Jr.
Mrs. Ida C. Whitley
Sylvia Carraway
Mrs. W. G. Holt



New Sanctuary – 2003

APPENDIX II

Ministerial Staff:

- Reverend Tommy Payne -- Pastor (1964-1971)
 Reverend Gordon Conklin -- Pastor (1971-1986)
 Dr. Gregory P. Rogers -- Pastor (1986- present)
 Mrs. Treva Fidler [Fisher] -- Minister of Music (1981-1992)*
 Mr. Neil Booth -- Minister of Education (1982-1983)
 Reverend Gregory P. Rogers -- Minister of Education/Assoc. Minister for Education (1983-1986)
 Reverend LaCount Anderson -- Associate Minister for Education (1987-1993)
 Reverend Michael R. McKnight -- Minister of Music (1993-present)
 Reverend Beth Thompson -- Minister of Education (1994-present)
 Reverend Layne Rogerson -- Minister of Youth and

College Students (1996-2003)
Reverend Stephen C. Harding -- Minister of Media,
Arts and Children (2002-present)
Mrs. Amy Andrews – Minister of Youth and College
(2004-present)
Mrs. Jimmie S. Hughes – Interim Director of Mis-
sions (2003-present)*
Reverend Sam Martin – Interim Minister of Youth
(2003-2004)*

Music Ministry Staff:

Mr. Bruce Sloop -- Choir Director (1964-1966)*
Mr. Richard Orr -- Organist (1964-1965)*
Mr. Michael Howell – Organist (1965)*
Dr. Charles Stevens – Choir Director (1966-1977)*
Ms. Marlene Boger – Organist (1968)*
Mr. James Twyne – Organist (1969-1972)*
Ms. Linda Christenson – Organist (1972)*
Ms. Karen Helms -- Organist (1973)*
Mr. Michael Alvey -- Organist (1974-1978)*
Mr. David Rockefeller – Choir Director (1978)*
Mr. William Frazier – Choir director (1978)*
Ms. Susan Beck – Organist (1978)*
Mr. David Faber – Choir Director (1979-1981)*
Ms. Diane Bridger – Organist (1979-1981)*
Mr. Warren Bass – Organist (1981-1982)*
Ms. Becky Tyndall – Organist (1982-1992)*
Mrs. Treva Fidler [Fisher] -- Minister of Music (1981-
1992)*
Mr. Stephen C. Harding – Choir Director (1992-1993)*
Reverend Michael McKnight -- Minister of Music
(1993-present)
Ms. Mitzi Benfield -- Organist (1992-1993)*
Mr. Patrick Droppleman – Organist (1993-1994)*
Mr. James Gilliam -- Organist (1994-2000)*

Mrs. Alisa Gilliam -- Pianist (1994-present)*
Mrs. Karen Meetze -- Organist (2004-present)*
Mr. Russell Knight—Music Assistant (2000-2001)*
Mr. Jason Barclift -- Music Assistant (2001-present)*

Non-Ministerial Staff:

Mr. Charlie Best -- Sexton (1968-1988)*
Mrs. Coleen W. Allen -- Secretary (1964-1972)*
Mrs. Helen Scoggins -- Secretary (1972)*
Mrs. Elsie Pollock -- Church/Financial Secretary
(1972-1980)*
Ms. Pat Emerson -- Secretary (1981-1986)*
Mrs. Bertha Bradshaw -- Secretary (1986)*
Ms. Linda Ballard -- Secretary (1986-1988)*
Ms. Pat Emerson -- Financial Secretary (1988-
1989)*
Mrs. Molly Nichols -- Secretary (1988 -1992)
Mr. Raymond Bryant -- Sexton (1988-1992)*
Ms. Lauri R. Johnson -- Pastoral/Music Ministry
Secretary (1992-present)
Mrs. Anne D. Reese -- Financial Secretary (1989 --
present)*
Mrs. Sally A. Pride -- Educational Ministries Secre-
tary (2003-present)
Mr. Gene Carr—Food Services (1985-present)*
Mr. Randy Little -- Sexton (1992-1994)
Mr. Michael Aycock -- Sexton (1994-1998)
Mr. Ronald O. Cleveland -- Sexton (1998-present)
Mr. Ralph M. Molitor -- Sexton (2003-present)*
Mr. D. Wayne Taylor -- Sexton (2003-present)*
Mrs. Debbie D. Britner -- Educational Ministry Sec-
retary (1997-1999)

Mrs. Tammy Warburton –Educational Ministry Secretary (1999-2001)

Ms. Bev Lindemann – Educational Ministry Secretary (2002-2003)

Summer Youth Workers:

Jeff Chadwick (1975)*

Greg Rogers (1976, 1977)*

Mike Bradshaw – Minister of Education & Youth (1978)*

Larry Peters (1979)*

Steve Mills (1980)*

Steve Warren – Youth Director (1981-1982)*

* Denotes part-time position

Diaconate Chairpersons:

Mr. E.R. Carraway (April 1964-Sept 1964; 1967-1969; 1974-1975; 1978-1979; 1988-1989)

Dr. Robert L. Holt (1964-1965; 1975-1976; 1979-1980)

Mr. Edwin E. Rawl, Jr. (1965-1966)

Dr. Thomas J. Haigwood (1966-1967)

Mr. Edwin H. Dixon (1969-1970)

Reverend F. Milan Johnson (1970-1971; 1973-1974)

Dr. Joe Pou (1971-1973)

Mr. Kenneth Mercer (1976-1977)

Dr. James Bearden (1977-1978)

Mr. Greenville Banks, Jr. (1980-1981; 1986-1987; 1993-1994)

Mr. Don Parrott (1981-1982)

Mr. Gerald Southerland (1982-1983)

Dr. Jerry Tester (1983-1984)

Mr. Mahlon Dickens (1984-1985)

Dr. Wayne Kendrick (1985-1986)

Mr. Tom Reese (1987-1988)
Dr. Randy Renegar (1989-1990)
Mrs. Martha Banks (1990-1991)
Dr. Jannis Shea (1991-1992)
Mr. Gregg James (1992-1993)
Dr. Charlie Barrier (1994-1995)
Mr. Stan Mills (1995-1996)
Mr. Dennis Biggs (1996-1997; 2003-2004))
Mr. Dave Morris (1997-1998)
Mrs. Lynne James (1998-1999)
Mr. Joe Edwards (1999-2000)
Mr. Jeff Foster (2000-2001)
Dr. Randy Fussell (2001-2002)
Mrs. Sharron Edwards (2002-2003)

W. M. U. Presidents:

Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson (1964-1965)
Mrs. Lily Weaver (1965-1968)
Mrs. Nancy Dixon (1968-1970)
Mrs. Mary Ree McLaurin (1970-1972)
Mrs. Betty Leggett (1972-1973)
Mrs. Josie "Barnie" Rawl (1973-1977)
Mrs. Mary Cain (1977-1978)
Mrs. Mildred Still (1978-1982)
Mrs. Vicki Marx (1982-1984)
Mrs. Martha Banks (1984-1986)
Mrs. Lily Weaver (1986-1989)
Mrs. Robbie Payne (1989-1990)
Mrs. Marilyn Renegar (1990-1992)
Mrs. Lynn Meade (1992-1995)
Mrs. Amy Roberson (1995-1997)
Mrs. Laura Sharpe (1997-1998)
Mrs. Jimmie Hughes (1998-2004)

Sunday School Directors:

Mr. E. R. Carraway (1964-1967)
Mr. Sheldon C. Downes (1967-1972)
Mr. Tracy McLaurin (1972-1974)
Mr. Fred E. Daniel (1974-1978)
Mr. Steven E. Howell (1979-1981)
Mr. Mahlon Dickens (1982-1983)
Mr. Garland Beddard (1983-1985)
Mr. Don Duke (1985-1988)
Mr. Olin Davis (1988-1989)
Mr. James Perkins (1989-1992)
Mrs. Lynne James (1992-1996; 1999-2000)
Mr. Bobby Nichols (1997-1998)
Mr. & Mrs. Gregg & Lynne James (2000-2001)
Mr. Gregg K. James (2001-2004)

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Holt, Robert L., March 20, 2004

Rogers, Gregory P., February 3, 2004

Stevens, Charles E., May 4, 2004

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